

ROSE & ORANGE: The bowls that matter most



# The Sporting News

See a Different Game

## NFL PLAYOFF PREVIEW

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to the Super Bowl  
goes through  
Kansas City

*Chiefs RB  
Marcus Allen*

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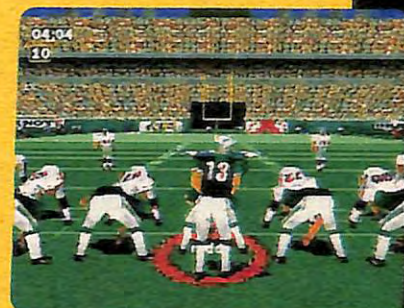
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From the Editor

## Behind the scenes at TSN

The relaunch of THE SPORTING NEWS has been a resounding success, judging by the responses from longtime and newer readers alike. The format and color only enhance the content. One reader, a close friend named Tom, told me we must have increased the content dramatically because he was spending more time with the magazine each week. Although we have added a fair amount of content, Tom is reading more because the presentation makes it so much easier.

The task of converting to the current format was daunting, and the timetable was nearly insane. It never would have worked without the steady hands of art director Bill Wilson and prepress director Mike Bruner. Mike and Bill are two of the most-seasoned TSN employees, and they have seen



Wilson (left) and Bruner.

plenty of changes ... some that stuck and some that didn't; some that succeeded and some that failed. They constructed a magazine that is visually pleasing and easy to navigate.

"In 111 years of publishing, this is the most dramatic change TSN has gone through, and I was thrilled to be a key contributor," Bill says. "Color reproduction and better paper stock were only the beginning.

The challenge was to retain what we did best—and reinvent a better way of delivering it. We wanted to make our identity even more obvious to readers."

The relationship between Mike and Bill, built over 11 years working together, was what got us through tense times and long hours. "This has been an exciting and challenging process," Mike says. "We have a talented and devoted staff, and people have invested their time and emotion in this magazine. I am just proud to be a part of that tradition."

*John Rawlings*

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# The Sporting News

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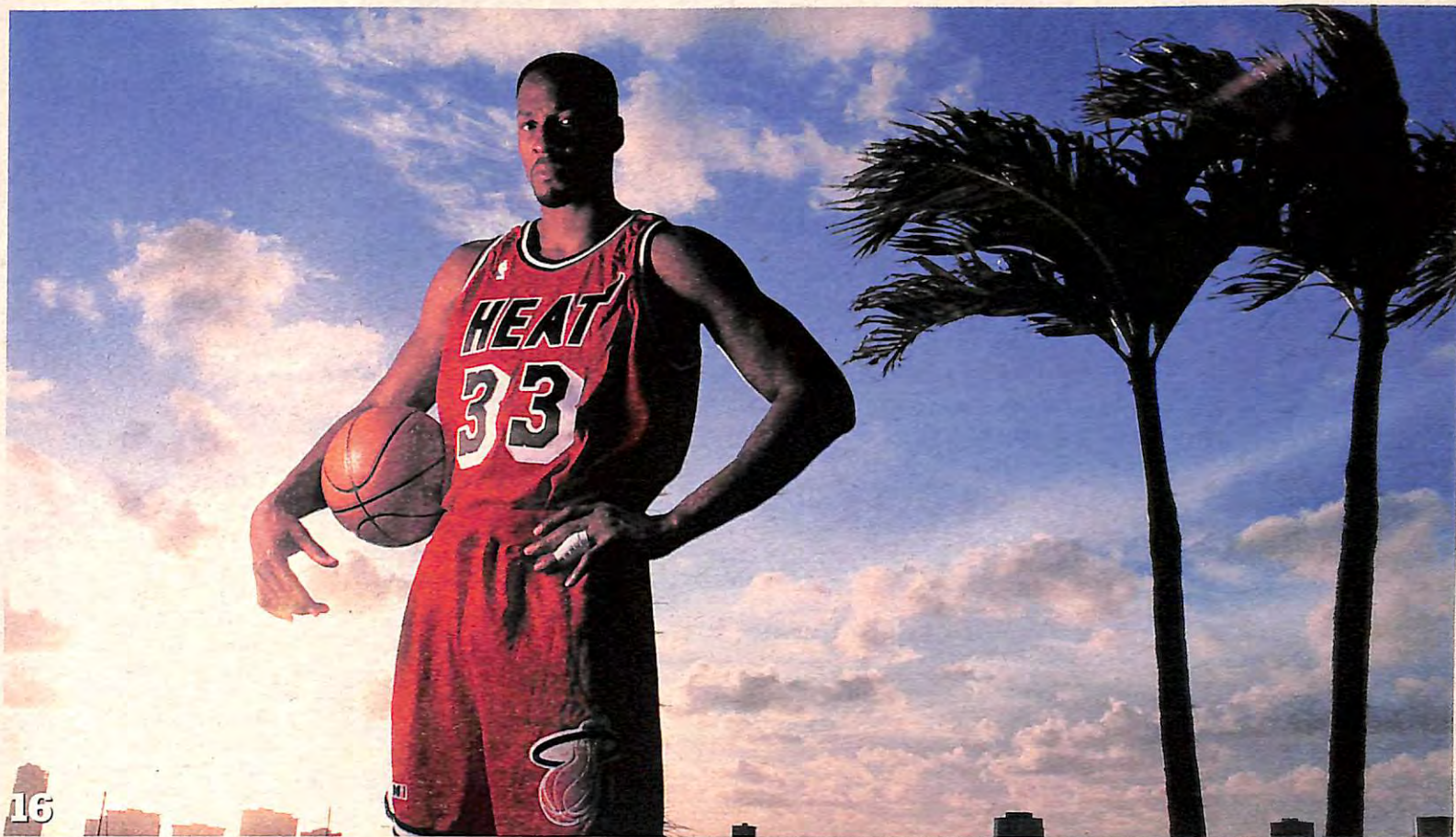
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# Voice of the Fan

**Choice voice** 'If I did to one of my bosses what Latrell Sprewell did to his, I'd probably end up in Leavenworth.'

—Dan McNamara  
Fort Campbell, Ky.

## Expos' recruits?

Dave Kindred did a wonderful job on the Mark McGwire Sportsman of the Year story. But, tell me, how did you get the 1998 Montreal Expos to pose on the cover with him?

Geoff Mueller  
Austin, Texas



ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

**MARK OF A CHAMPION:**  
Sportsman extraordinaire.

## Heads up! Heads down!

What an incredible play for TSN to name Mark McGwire as its Sportsman of the Year. However, when choosing the TSN college football All-American team, leaving Andy Katzenmoyer (Butkus Award winner) from your defense was not so brilliant.

Sam Clark  
Brilliant, Ohio

## Grid locked

Football fields were designed many years ago for people of close to normal sizes. Today's players are so big and fast the field seems confining.

I enjoy films of games from the 1950s and '60s with wide-open offenses that could use the outside

runs. Perhaps widening the hash marks like college would bring new strategies to the game.

Andy Kastenhuber  
North Haven, Conn.

## Not well Dunn

Warrick Dunn as one of the top five running backs of the future (TSN, November 17)? What about Corey Dillon and his 246-yard rookie rushing record?

Matt Robinson  
Lena, Ill.

## Off the Mark, eh?

So you Americans think you can beat us Canadians in hockey in the Olympics at Nagano because we did not select Mark Messier. Well, think again because Mark Messier is an overrated, past-his-prime, egoistic hockey player that has no place on Team Canada. Thank you, Bobby Clarke and company. We have the perfect team to lead us to the gold. Sorry, United States, try again in the next World Cup.

Barry Naymark  
Ottawa

## Doctor, Doctor

From Cornhusker fans from Texas: Dr. Tom Osborne, we love you and will miss you.

Gary Griffith  
Breckenridge, Texas

## Shopping Spree?

I have a multiple choice question for people who think Latrell Sprewell got a bad deal, especially Charles Barkley and Johnnie Cochran.

If you were yelling at an employee who wasn't working up to his potential and he tried to strangle you, would you:

A) Fire him.



EMILE VANSTEEK / AP

## Heis and lows, man!

Should a pitcher win the MVP? A reliever win the Cy Young Award? None of those arguments draw as much mail as college fans wondering if it is an injustice to give a defensive player the Heisman Trophy.

Most of our readers thought Peyton Manning was wronged by those who voted for Charles Woodson, except maybe Barry Leonard of Stamford, Conn., who wrote, "Charles Woodson. HEISMAN. Enough said," or Jeff Ferry of Seattle, who wrote, "(TSN college football writer) Tom Dienhart was 100 percent correct. The Heisman is given to the best college football player whose athletic talent has made a major impact on his team. What more can you ask for in Woodson, a big playmaker who has led his team to an 11-0 record going into the Rose Bowl, along with contributing on both sides of the ball."

Wrote Larry Moore of Evansville, Ind.: "So, Manning and Tennessee couldn't beat Florida. Well, neither could Maddux and that great Atlanta pitching staff, but who is the best pitcher year in and year out? Maddux. And Manning is the best college football player today."

"The Heisman award no longer means 'the best' in college football. Woodson was not the best, or even close to it. He hasn't been a standout for more than a couple of games," wrote G.H. Lohmann of Peachtree, City, Ga.

As expected, Manning received support from the home of the Volunteers. "If the Heisman is awarded to the player whose play contributed the most to his team's success, then Manning is the clear choice," wrote Troy Goodale of Knoxville, Tenn. "Which game would Michigan have lost if Woodson wasn't on the field? Answer: none. Michigan had three games that were decided by a touchdown or less. Woodson didn't play any offensive plays in two of those games. Conversely, if not for Manning, Tennessee would have lost the SEC Championship game and the Vols would have probably lost to Arkansas and Vanderbilt without Manning's leadership and playmaking ability."

B) Suspend him for a year.

C) Say "Wow, son, you've got a heck of a grip there, now let's get back to work?"

Fred Bayerlein  
Honolulu

displays loyalty to the fans and to the game.

Eduardo Zamudio  
Dana Point, Calif.

## Managing 101

Deep down inside, who do you really think derived more satisfaction from the 1997 season—Jim Leyland or his best friend, Gene Lamont?

## Tony Award

It's a shame few athletes are interested in playing a sport for the love of the game, the glory of victory or appreciation of the game. Instead, money seems to be the driving force. Thank god for players such as San Diego's Tony Gwynn, who, besides being underpaid in today's salary structures,

As I watched the parade in Miami, I felt good for Leyland's success, but does he really have peace of mind for taking credit for the best team money can buy? Somehow I think not.

The Huizengas, Reinsdorfs, Steinbrenners, now Colangelos, along with Jerry Jones, Art Modell and the Irsays all get their just rewards in the end.

Let's see how great a manager Leyland is now with a lower-budget team in '98.

Charlie Tuttle  
Greenville, Pa.

## Lindros the non-leader

If performance matters, then Timothy Dwyer's article on Eric Lindros (TSN, December 17) is wrong.

Lindros' failure to lift his own and his team's level in last spring's Stanley Cup finals should exclude him from consideration as captain of the Canadian Olympic Team.

David C. White  
Brooklyn

## Missing Scottie

Michael Jordan is absolutely the best weapon in the NBA. He scores points by the truckload, and in a tight game he's the man you want to get the ball to. But Scottie Pippen seemed to bring to the Bulls something that Michael can't or just doesn't do.

Michael seems to take his shots without much help from the other guys, who take theirs without much help from MJ. Pippen was the conduit between the two entities.

Sean Curtis  
South Amboy, N.J.

**Got a comment?** THE SPORTING NEWS would love to hear from you. Write Voice of the Fan, 10176 Corporate Square Drive, Suite 200, St. Louis, Mo. 63132, fax your message to us at 314-997-0765, or send us electronic mail at [fans@sportingnews.com](mailto:fans@sportingnews.com). Be sure to include your name and city with your e-mail. THE SPORTING NEWS reserves the right to edit letters for brevity and content.

# TSNights

## Wait and see how they stack up



Hey, didn't you used to be the Broncos' bandwagon?

■ The Spies say the Pistons're hopin' Jerry Stackhouse'll play Da Pip to Grant Hill's MJ with Brian Williams fillin' out the "big three" that NBA blueprints've stressed for success. If the Pistons're able to retain Stack, an F.A.-to-be, they'll still be \$10 mil under the salcap, so they could shop the top shelf on the free-agent aisle.

■ Speaking of the Stackhouse deal, backwash of this here trade was Eric Montross, who has gone from rook-with-potential to econo-7-footer who can't throw it in the ocean.

Whispers one NBA suit: "I

don't know what happened to that kid."

■ Don't think there ain't a sense-o-Flyrony that Jason Collier walks, and General Knight has to turn to Richard Mandeville and Andrae Patterson to fill creamy middle of this here Hoosiers team. The Spies say Knight called Mandeville and Patterson into his office at the end of last season to, um, encourage them to transfer because their minutes were gonna shrink this season.

■ Fly's Top 5 or "Rice Coulda/Woulda Been Nice, But Here's Who's Key to the Niners' Subpar Bowl Push": 1. Garrison Hearst; 2. Steve Young; 3. Dana Stubblefield; 4. Merton Hanks; 5. Fans at the 'Stick.

■ If a ballpark near you ain't featurin' an old-timers game, fear not, pal. They're playin' '81 of 'em at Camden Yards this season. The latest graybeard to X with the O's is Joe Carter, who turns 38 in March. Only five players



**BIRDS OF A FEATHER:** They flock together in Baltimore, these Orioles whose average age is 32-plus years.

on Ballamer's projected O-day roster're south-o-30; seven'll be 35 or older. With an average age of over 32, count 'em, years, this team'll get the AARP discount at road hotels.

■ Speaking of the O's,

Fly hears the proof positive that there's been a change-o-managers is that the owner's listenin' to the skip's suggestions.

■ The Spies say NCAA gumshoes couldn't sniff out any "serious" viola-

tions by UMichigan hoops, so the Wolverines' penance'll probably be to tighten scholarship belt by a coupla notches. Findings in Fly's official letter of inquiry: lack-o-consistency. This here team sandwiches a win over Duke between losses this season to directional Michigan schools? Geez, you'd think Steve Fish was still coach.

■ Fly's havin' hard time (shaddup!) seein' Terry Murray as Wayne Gretzky's kinda guy, but the Spies say 1) Colin Campbell's good as gone, 2) Murray wants back behind the bench thisbad and 3) the short list of available coaches with pedigree is, well, short.

■ Finally, the Spies say Paul (Is That Yer Head-Coaching Record or Yer Locker Combination?) Hackett's in mid-recruiting season form. When asked early last week if he was in the running for John Robinson's job, he said: "There's nothing going on with USC."

## The Starting Five

What the sports world is talking about this week

**1 American Express pays \$2 million for marketing rights at Pro Player Stadium.** For another 50 grand, Wayne Huizenga would've thrown in an All-Star.

**2 Michael Jordan vs. Kobe Bryant.** Windmill dunks, fallaway layups, twisting drives and jams. Oh yeah, MJ had a pretty good game, too.

**3 Bill Romanowski's loogie.** He says he lost his cool. We just thought he was a baseball player.

**4 Wild-card games.** Fighting impossible odds to get to the Super Bowl. Hey, Saints fans, sound familiar?

**5 An Ontario teachers union may sell its stake in the Maple Leafs.** They want a less risky investment—like Korean T-bills.

## sportTSNNumbers



FRANK THOMAS: At the cash corner.

If you think third base is the hot corner, then you haven't seen the average '97 salaries by position. Going by the MLBPA's stats, the big league numbers-crunchers play first base. Looking for the guys who live a comparatively modest lifestyle? They're warming up in the 'pen.

Position	Average	Players
First base	\$3,717,579	22
DH	\$3,583,788	7
Outfield	\$2,555,693	66
Second base	\$2,380,949	21
Third base	\$2,275,999	23
Starting pitcher	\$1,968,597	116
Catcher	\$1,921,614	20
Shortstop	\$1,735,298	25
Relief pitcher	\$717,901	174

**Note:** Figures include position players with 100 or more games at the position; designated hitters with 80 or more; starting pitchers with 19 or more starts; and relievers with 25 or more relief appearances.

## Our view of the week

### Bulldogged

We expressed concerns last year (TSN, December 2, 1996) as Fresno State entered Year 2 of the Jerry Tarkanian era: "The new Tark seems remarkably like the old Tark."

Today we know: The basketball team's point guard rolled his car in an accident, its best player is fresh out of rehab and one of next year's recruits just spent two days in jail. That doesn't take into account sundry other incidents under Tark's watch.

Fresno State knew what it was getting with Tark. Of course, his team's stumbling start this season probably wasn't in the equation for hitting the big time.

Last week, in the back of Selland Arena, a visitor sat with boosters and talked Bulldogs sports, the Red Wave and Tark over coffee and cheesecake. The visitor: Mike Wallace of *60 Minutes*.

Yes, Fresno, you've hit the big time, indeed.

### No sale?

As the Marlins' sell-a-thon continues, word is Wayne Huizenga's sale of the team has hit a snag. Even if Don Smiley's group raises \$150 million (the latest owner-imposed deadline for the sale passed last Friday), Huizenga likely will be stuck with the team for another season.

Any sale still has to be approved, and that could take awhile if baseball has to investigate a potential ownership group roughly the size of a major league roster. If MLB can't move quickly on Rupert Murdoch's purchase of the Dodgers, can Huizenga expect a quick sale?

And, if the Smiley group falls through? Huizenga is left with a stripped-down team, fellow ownership that will resist his moving the team to, say, northern Virginia and a fan base so disenchanting that a new south Florida stadium would be a very tough sell.



My turn/Ann Killion

## A costly comeback

**Rice may be out until next season, but don't underestimate his impact on the 49ers as they play through the playoffs**

Jerry Rice—in one moment last week—captured the triumph of the human spirit and the frailty of the body. He also gave us something we've seen little of in this era of choking, spitting and pocketing the paycheck: absolute dedication to his craft.

In the second quarter against Denver, Rice rose between two defenders to receive a touchdown pass, an astounding sight considering he was ruled out for the season 15 weeks earlier. As he caught the ball, he lifted his team's spirits and possibly changed the course of the 49ers' playoff hopes.

Then he landed in the end zone, directly on his vulnerable left knee, cracking his kneecap and proving that one man's body is, after all, fallible. That the sport of football favors no one, even Jerry Rice.

Since that Monday night game, the second-guessing has come fast and furious. Should he have come back? Why did the 49ers allow him to? Why did team doctors clear him? Does first-year coach Steve Mariucci make the decisions, or do the players?

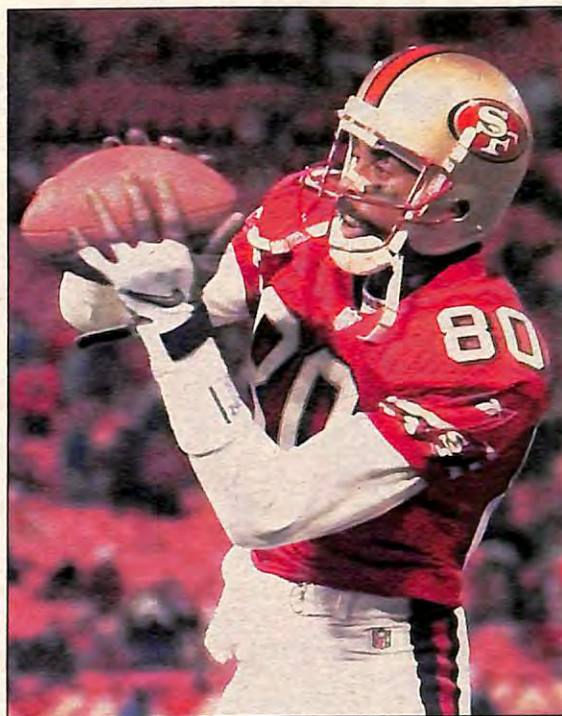
The 49ers complicated the issue by absolving themselves of guilt, claiming his new injury is unrelated to his previous one, a point on which virtually every independent orthopedist disagrees. A cracked patella is one of the known risks of the surgery Rice underwent September 1.

Of course the 49ers wish they'd done it differently. They rolled the dice and lost. They'd rather have Rice available in the playoffs than in Game 15. Now he won't be available until minicamp. The team's playoff chances are dimmed without him, particularly if running back Garrison Hearst still is injured.

But Rice has no regrets. He set a goal and—no matter the final outcome—he achieved it. He chose 106 days of torture, rehabilitating his knee. He knew the risks and decided to play. The responsibility ultimately lies with him.

The 49ers could have stopped him. Bill Walsh and George Seifert probably would have. But the culture has changed. It is a veteran team, whose success thus far has stemmed from its players' leadership. Derailing Rice's comeback may have divided the team, because it was something Rice wanted so badly.

"I think I've paid the price to be part of it," Rice said, a few weeks before his comeback. "This has made me realize how much I enjoy going out in uniform." Rice plies his



**JERRY MATTERED:** Through sheer determination, Rice willed himself to come back this season.

trade in a brutal workplace. At 35, he has always known his next play could be his last. He defied the odds for 12 seasons, never missing a game. The odds caught up with him quickly, with two major injuries in two games. It happened to be the same knee, but it could have been a concussion, a cracked vertebra, a broken leg. In the aftermath of the injury, don't diminish what Rice accomplished. And, though the 49ers are weakened without him, don't underestimate what he has given his team.

He provided his team with a tangible reward—home-field advantage for the playoffs. The 49ers might have beaten Denver without him or gone on to beat Seattle. But the team has a recent history of blowing crucial late-season games, so all bets were off. The 49ers were down 10-0 when Rice caught his touchdown. He changed the

game's momentum. He dominated during the nine plays he was in.

"Did he help us win the game?" Mariucci asked. "You'd better believe he did. ... He showed what one man can do when he really sets his mind to it."

And that legacy also will be Rice's parting gift to his team. Rice's life is rich—he has every important touchdown record, more money than he ever dreamed of, a wife who is healthy after almost dying in childbirth last year and three beautiful children.

Yet he worked harder than any rookie or college walk-on to get back to his job. To join his team.

"He doesn't need to prove anything," safety Merton Hanks says. "But he wanted to come out and play with us. You can't teach that type of dedication."

Work ethic and determination seem to be outdated traits in today's sports world. But Rice provided a dramatic reminder of what sets apart true champions. As the playoffs begin, Green Bay will be the NFC favorite. But the 49ers learned two things from Rice this season. That they can win without him. And that nothing comes easy. No one will accuse the 49ers of not giving their all. The players will have to, or they will never be able to look their teammate, No. 80, in the eyes again.

TSN

Ann Killion is a columnist for the *San Jose Mercury News* and writes a monthly column for *THE SPORTING NEWS*.

**Sound bite** 'They're liable to spend just as much on the UPS delivery as they would have if they wound up keeping everybody.'

—Pitcher Dennis Cook, who like myriad former Marlins will get his World Series ring shipped to him because he has been traded

## Diary

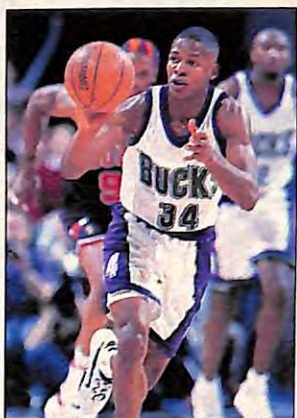
**Ray Allen**  
G/ Bucks

Ray Allen spent much of the NBA offseason last summer working on a Spike Lee movie called "He Got Game." Allen got bit by the acting bug and really got into the experience, saying it was a lot like playing professional basketball. He definitely is interested in doing more acting. He talks with TSN correspondent Gregg Hoffmann.

It was a great experience. I played a high school recruit who goes through the whole thing that many of us do.

Spike Lee is a basketball fan and really knows the game. The film is set to come out in May. I think it will create a little controversy and draw interest.

It was hard work. I had to focus differently, yet there also are similarities. You're entertaining people in



ROBERT SEALE / TSN

acting and in basketball. The media bring you closer to the fans. They want to know about you and are interested in what you have to say.

I think it's interesting trying to think like your character might think. In this film, I played a basketball player. I've been through the recruiting thing, although it was a few years ago, but I could identify with the character.

I expect some basketball players and fans will go to the film to see if I can act. Not every basketball movie

has done well at the box office. I think Spike's work is exceptional though.

I'm interested in doing more acting. Mike Warren is one guy who went from basketball to a long acting career. I have a lot to learn about acting, but I enjoyed it and am willing to work at it.

Most of the work was during the offseason. I've talked to Spike about a few things since the season started, but I've been concentrating on basketball. I've had to play some point guard because of an injury to Terrell Brandon. It calls for me to refocus a little, because it's different than playing off-guard.

We've also had some changes on the team with the trade that brought in Terrell and Tyrone Hill, and sent Vin Baker to Seattle. I've had to adjust to new guys and their style of play. So, it has been a growing year in more than one way.

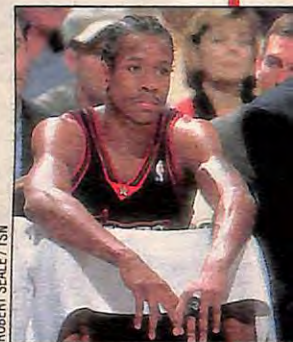
## HOTBOX

Never mind the end of the Orange Bowl as we know it, thanks to the Super Alliance; the Orange Bowl Parade could be a goner after next week. The parade's problems are complex, but the shorthand goes like this: Under the current system, which ends with next week's step-off, any network that bought the rights to the game was required to televise the parade. With a national-TV audience guaranteed, sugar-daddy corporations paid top dollar to sponsor floats. Under the Super Alliance, "title sponsor" money is funneled to conferences instead of the bowl committees (the O-Bowl Committee had used the dough to underwrite the parade). Also, CBS' three-year contract expires this year. ABC has a direct deal with the conferences, which eliminates the committee's right to demand a televised parade. The committee has asked—accent on asked—ABC to continue televising the parade, which costs about \$1 million and typically loses \$100,000. If it folds, then the 109-year-old Rose, so strong and lucrative it hasn't been forced to enlist a title sponsor, would be the last of the great bowl-tied parades.

**BOOK CLUB** Golfers who love books and good sports art should take that leftover holiday money and think about calling Sleeping Bear Press (1-800-487-2323). This purveyor of fine golf books has some nice new titles to offer, including **A Wee Nip at the 19th Hole** (By Richard Mackenzie. 136 pp. \$18.95), stories about caddies at The Old Course, St. Andrews, compiled by the caddie master himself. More urgently since quantities are limited, inquire about the St. Andrews Lithograph Collection, a group of six photographs taken by **Iain Macfarlane Lowe**, course photographer at St. Andrews. These six images, printed on 22- by 28-inch stock, depict the wonders of the Old Course in all its mystical beauty, gorse and heather included. Each lithograph is signed and numbered with a certificate of authenticity. The price of a single plate is \$95 with a 50 percent discount available by buying a book, too. Try ordering from [www.sleepingbearpress.com](http://www.sleepingbearpress.com). —Steve Gietschier

**CHANNELING** HBO's *Real Sports With Bryant Gumbel* has added veteran sports journalist **Armen Keteyian** to its impressive stable of correspondents. Keteyian also assumes new duties January 1 at CBS Sports as a special features reporter. ... Are you ready for some ESPYs? ESPN has announced plans to team with Broadway Video, the company behind *Saturday Night Live*, to produce the cable network's annual ESPY Awards. This year's event will take place February 9 and will be telecast live from Radio City Music Hall. —Ken Amos

**PSSST** Allen Iverson apparently isn't "The Answer" to your sneaker wants and needs. Sales of the new Iverson model, *The Answer*, have been disappointing. Investment strategist **Paul Foster** says the 76ers star just isn't as popular as others who have their names attached to footwear—most notably a certain most-powerful Bulls superstar: ... If it's all about dating and mating, women, then think sports, says no less of an authority than *Ladies' Home Journal*. Single women should go to sporting events, 'cause that's where the boys are. "Get together with several friends and pony up enough money to buy season tickets to the games of local pro teams," columnist **Alendra Penney** writes. "Then divvy the tickets up among all of you. Baseball is a good choice, basketball even better."

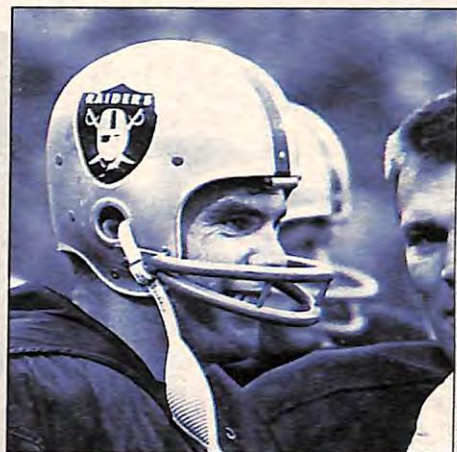


Iverson

## Q&A

Could you tell me when the famous "Heidi game" took place between the New York Jets and Oakland Raiders?

Eric S. White  
North Adams, Mass.



TSN ARCHIVES

**SWISS MISSED:** Daryle Lamonica and the Raiders' comeback were bumped by Heidi.

chose the Chiefs' 31-28 come-from-behind, Monday night victory over the Broncos on October 17, 1994, as the most memorable game.

### The top 10 most memorable regular-season games, as selected by the media:

- |                            |                   |                          |                    |
|----------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Raiders 43, Jets 32     | November 17, 1968 | 6. 49ers 38, Saints 35   | December 7, 1980   |
| 2. Dolphins 38, Bears 24   | December 2, 1985  | 7. Jets 51, Dolphins 45  | September 21, 1986 |
| 3. Bears 61, 49ers 30      | December 12, 1965 | 8. Saints 19, Lions 17   | November 8, 1970   |
| 4. Cowboys 24, Redskins 23 | November 28, 1974 | 9. Chiefs 31, Broncos 28 | October 17, 1994   |
| 5. Cowboys 35, Redskins 35 | December 16, 1979 | 10. Bills 37, Colts 35   | September 21, 1997 |



**ON THE MOVE:** Wistrom's pass rush may be the key element for Nebraska's top-notch defense.

ALBERT DICKSON/TSN

# TSN PREVIEW ORANGE BOWL

**NEBRASKA (12-0) vs. TENNESSEE (11-1)** January 2, Miami, CBS, 8 p.m. ET

This is the final game for Nebraska coach Tom Osborne and Tennessee quarterback/folk hero Peyton Manning. And depending on what happens January 1 in the Rose Bowl, this one could be for the national title, too. A Michigan loss likely means the winner of the Orange Bowl wins the championship.

The Huskers are aiming for their third national title in four years, thanks to—as usual—a high-level option offense (keyed by Scott Frost) and a stout defensive front four (led by end Grant Wistrom and tackle Jason Peter). But Nebraska has shown some susceptibility to the pass, which means Manning and Tennessee could pose some problems. Then again, if

that stout front rules the line of scrimmage, Manning may not have time to pass.

There's a nagging feeling Tennessee isn't the No. 3 team in the nation and thus shouldn't be in this game, but the Vols won the SEC and have a potent offense. The big question: Are the Vols physical enough to handle the Huskers? There's no question Tennessee has big-play capability on offense, with a good receiving corps and tailback Jamal Lewis. But can its defense curb Nebraska's big-play potential?

All in all, this could be a tremendous stage for the Osborne and Manning finales. If this happens to be for the national championship, there's a chance for a storybook ending.

## WHEN NEBRASKA HAS THE BALL

### Nebraska's running game

Quarterback Scott Frost makes the Huskers' option go. He has been sharp all season, making good decisions on when to pitch and when to keep the ball. Tailback Ahman Green finished second in the nation in rushing (156.4 ypg) and is the primary threat. Fullback Joel Makovicka is an unsung player but a key factor; defenses key so much on Green and Frost that they sometimes forget about the fullback, who then gouges them for a 12-yard run. Obviously, stopping the Huskers' running game is the key to beating them. One problem: No one has really done that since September 1996, when Nebraska was shut down by Arizona State.

**Key matchup:** If Nebraska's offensive line gets a good push, the Huskers' quest will be a lot easier. There's no question Nebraska is as physical as any team in the nation. If the line's muscle rules the day, the Huskers win.

### Tennessee's run defense

Tennessee is eighth in the nation in run defense, but no one really gives the Vols much of a chance to slow the Huskers' option attack; indeed, part of the reason the Vols' ranking is so high is that they played four of the 25 worst rushing teams in the nation, including two of the three worst. The Vols lost perhaps their best interior lineman in late September when Billy Ratliff suffered a severe back injury. Still, they rotate four tackles, with Ron Green probably the best of the quartet. Ends Jonathan Brown and Corey Terry are good pass rushers, but that skill won't be much of a factor.

**Key matchup:** Outside linebacker Al Wilson has had a great season—when he has been healthy. A healthy Wilson is needed, because he and fellow outside man Raynoch Thompson need to play a steady game to slow Nebraska's option. Middle linebacker Leonard Little needs to stand up well against the run.

### Nebraska's passing game

Yes, the Huskers have receivers—they're those guys blocking so effectively downfield against the other team's defensive backs. Though blocking definitely is what the Huskers' receivers do best, Kenny Cheatham, Shevin Wiggins, Matt Davison and their playmates are physical guys who can make the catch when needed. Thing is, it's not often needed—the Huskers completed only 99 passes this season. Tight ends Tim Carpenter, Sheldon Jackson and Vershan Jackson can be effective at times, though basically each is a third tackle.

**Key matchup:** None, really. But if Nebraska is throwing a lot, that's not good. Scott Frost can be an adequate passer; he also can throw some wounded ducks. If Frost attempts more than 15 passes, that means Tennessee's run defense is doing a great job. There's no way the Huskers can win if they are forced to throw.

### Tennessee's pass defense

The Volunteers have a solid secondary, but they won't be worrying about a lot of coverage schemes; they'll be worried about stopping the run. That means safeties Cory Gaines and Tori Noel—who are physical guys—will be near the line of scrimmage on virtually every first and second down. Cornerbacks Terry Fair and Dwayne Goodrich are good cover guys; expect Tennessee to let the corners play man on the Huskers' receivers so the safeties can worry about the run. On the rare occasions the Huskers do pass, the corners need to make sure Nebraska doesn't get any cheap big plays. The corners can't be lulled to sleep by the Huskers' constant running. The safeties also have to worry about the tight ends near the goal line.

**Key matchup:** Noel and Gaines have to play the option intelligently and need to make sure they wrap up Nebraska backs when they have a shot at them.

### CORNHUSKERS DATA

#### 1997 results

Aug. 30	Akron	W	59-14
Sept. 13	Central Florida	W	38-24
Sept. 20	at Washington	W	27-14
Oct. 4	Kansas State	W	56-26
Oct. 11	at Baylor	W	49-21
Oct. 18	Texas Tech	W	29-0
Oct. 25	at Kansas	W	35-0
Nov. 1	Oklahoma	W	69-7
Nov. 8	at Missouri	W	45-38
Nov. 15	Iowa State	W	77-14
Nov. 28	at Colorado	W	27-24
Dec. 6	Texas A&M (at San Antonio)	W	54-15

### STARTING LINEUPS

#### Nebraska offense

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht./Wt.
14	Lance Brown	WR	5-11/190
73	Fred Pollack	LT	6-4/305
67	Aaron Taylor	LG	6-1/305
59	Josh Heskew	C	6-3/280
64	Jon Zatechka	RG	6-2/290
70	Eric Anderson	RT	6-4/305
90	Tim Carpenter	TE	6-3/250
6	Kenny Cheatham	WR	6-4/210
7	Scott Frost	QB	6-3/220
30	Ahman Green	TB	6-0/215
45	Joel Makovicka	FB	5-11/235
35	Kris Brown	K	5-10/205

#### Tennessee defense

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht./Wt.
91	Jonathan Brown	LE	6-4/245
50	Bill Duff	T	6-3/265
55	Ron Green	T	6-1/275
22	Corey Terry	RE	6-3/260
27	Al Wilson	LB	6-0/226
1	Leonard Little	MLB	6-3/247
46	Raynoch Thompson	LB	6-3/217
23	Dwayne Goodrich	CB	6-0/180
13	Terry Fair	CB	5-11/185
9	Tori Noel	SS	6-0/197
30	Cory Gaines	FS	5-11/185
8	Chris Hogue	P	6-1/188

### STATS THAT MATTER

#### Nebraska

**Rushing offense:** 392.6 yards/game (1st in nation).  
**Passing offense:** 121.1 yards/game (104th in nation, 12th in Big 12).  
**Total offense:** 513.7 yards/game (1st in nation).  
**Rushing defense:** 73.4 yards/game (1st in nation).  
**Pass-efficiency defense:** 112.7 points (32nd in nation, 4th in Big 12).  
**Total defense:** 257.3 yards/game (5th in nation, 2nd in Big 12).

## PIVOTAL MOMENT:

Nebraska prevailed, 45-38, in overtime against Missouri, thanks to a miracle on the last play of regulation. A pass from Scott Frost to Shevin Wiggins was batted down, but Wiggins kept the ball alive with his foot and Matt Davison scooped it up perhaps an inch off the ground to give the Huskers the tying touchdown.



**KEY COGS:** Nash and his receiver buddies have a shot to have big games against a mediocre secondary.

ROBERT SEALE/TSN

## Inside the Game With

# Kirk Herbstreit

There are two emotional stories in this game. Number one, this is Tom Osborne's last game as Nebraska's coach. I've recently talked to a lot of Huskers, and they are excited to win this game for Osborne. Number two, you have Tennessee with Peyton Manning having lost the Heisman and being injured. Hopefully, he's going to be OK to play. There are a lot of people who want to win this for Peyton after what happened to him (in the Heisman voting). Although emotions will be running high, all of that will go to the side after kickoff.

Both defenses are going to struggle to stop the other team's attack. I think the Huskers' offense is balanced enough with Scott Frost,

which will allow them to go through Tennessee. On the other side, I don't know if the Huskers can stop the Vols. The Tennessee passing game behind Manning and the running of Jamal Lewis will be hard to stop. This will be a high-scoring game with both teams likely reaching the 30-point mark and Nebraska just barely winning.

For the Vols to win, their front seven has to contain what I call the three-headed monster of Frost, Joel Makovicka and Ahman Green, and play well on first down. If the Vols can slow the Nebraska running game and put the Huskers in sure passing downs, Tennessee will be better off.

## TSN VERDICT: Nebraska 38, Tennessee 27

### WHEN TENNESSEE HAS THE BALL

#### Tennessee's running game

True freshman tailback Jamal Lewis has had a superb season. Since he became the starter in Game 4, the Volunteers have had a consistent and productive running game. Lewis, 14th in the nation in rushing (113.7 avg.), must have a good game. If he is stuffed, it'll be a long night for Peyton Manning and the Vols' passing attack. Lewis, who combines power with good speed, may have the most natural running talent of any back in this game. Will he get to show it? It's up to the Tennessee line. Fullback Shawn Bryson must block well, too.

**Key matchup:** Tennessee needs big games from interior guys Spencer Riley, Trey Teague and Mercedes Hamilton; they have to provide a push against Nebraska's three-man tackle rotation. The line has played well since an early-season loss to Florida. But in that one, Florida's defensive line manhandled Tennessee. That can't happen here.

#### Nebraska's run defense

The Huskers have received excellent line play this season. The tackle rotation of Jason Peter, Jason Wiltz and Steve Warren needs to provide an inside pass rush while making sure Tennessee tailback Jamal Lewis doesn't get running room. If Lewis runs effectively, that makes Tennessee's passing game much more dangerous. Middle linebacker Jay "Son of Chuck" Foreman is steady; expect him to meet up with Lewis a few times. No team really has run effectively against the Huskers except Missouri, which also gouged the Huskers with the pass—and Missouri's passing attack isn't in Tennessee's league.

**Key matchup:** If Nebraska tackles Peter, Wiltz and Warren control the line of scrimmage and take away Lewis' running lanes, the Huskers will have the Vols where they want them. Tennessee will be one-dimensional and the Huskers can tee off.

#### Tennessee's passing game

Peyton Manning and the Vols' high-octane passing attack gives Tennessee a chance. But the key is Manning's protection: Will he have time to throw? If he does, he could have a huge day against a mediocre Huskers secondary. The Vols have a nice quartet of receivers in Marcus Nash, Peerless Price, Jermaine Copeland and Andy McCullough, and these guys will have to be on top of their games. The Vols can't afford drops or poor routes. Nash is the go-to guy, but the others have big-play potential, too. Fullback Shawn Bryson can be an effective receiver.

**Key matchup:** If the Vols don't get good blocking up front, they won't win. That means tackles Chad Clifton and Cosey Coleman (a true freshman) have to be at their best against Huskers ends Grant Wistrom, Chad Kelsay and Mike Rucker. If those three are frequently in Manning's face, the Vols are in trouble.

#### Nebraska's pass defense

The Nebraska secondary is young and mediocre. If the front seven puts pressure on Peyton Manning, these guys will be OK. But if Manning gets time to throw, he'll carve them up. Expect true freshman corner Erwin Swiney to be picked on early and often. There's no question the secondary is Nebraska's weak link; there's also no question the weakness won't show if the front seven gets good pressure.

**Key matchup:** Nebraska doesn't want to leave its corners in precarious positions against Tennessee's solid corps of receivers. Thus, it's imperative the Huskers mount a good pass rush, which means All-American end Grant Wistrom needs a big game. Outside linebacker Octavious McFarlin, a former safety, is speedy coming off the corner. The Vols like to run a lot of four-wide receiver sets, and when they do, a running back will have to block McFarlin or other blitzing 'backers.

### VOLUNTEERS DATA

#### 1997 results

Aug. 30	Texas Tech	W	52-17
Sept. 6	at UCLA	W	30-24
Sept. 20	at Florida	L	20-33
Oct. 4	Mississippi	W	31-17
Oct. 11	Georgia	W	38-13
Oct. 18	Alabama (at Birmingham)	W	38-21
Nov. 1	South Carolina	W	22-7
Nov. 8	Southern Miss	W	44-20
Nov. 15	Arkansas (at Little Rock)	W	30-22
Nov. 22	at Kentucky	W	59-31
Nov. 29	Vanderbilt	W	17-10
Dec. 6	Auburn (at Atlanta)	W	30-29

### STARTING LINEUPS

#### Tennessee offense

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht./Wt.
12	Marcus Nash	WR	6-3/190
67	Chad Clifton	LT	6-6/300
68	Spencer Riley	LG	6-3/289
70	Trey Teague	C	6-5/287
75	Mercedes Hamilton	RG	6-3/295
52	Cosey Coleman	RT	6-5/320
82	Eric Diogu	TE	6-3/250
37	Peerless Price	WR	6-0/183
16	Peyton Manning	QB	6-5/222
31	Jamal Lewis	TB	6-1/220
24	Shawn Bryson	FB	6-1/212
4	Jeff Hall	K	6-0/182

#### Nebraska defense

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht./Wt.
57	Chad Kelsay	LE	6-3/250
99	Jason Wiltz	T	6-3/310
55	Jason Peter	T	6-5/285
98	Grant Wistrom	RE	6-5/255
37	Tony Ortiz	LB	6-0/215
44	Jay Foreman	MLB	6-1/235
4	Octavious McFarlin	LB	5-11/200
16	Erwin Swiney	CB	6-1/180
22	Ralph Brown	CB	5-10/180
21	Mike Brown	SS	5-11/205
3	Eric Warfield	FS	6-0/195
19	Jesse Kosch	P	6-0/190

### STATS THAT MATTER

#### Tennessee

**Rushing offense:** 151.1 yards/game (52nd in nation, 4th in SEC).  
**Passing offense:** 331.8 yards/game (6th in nation, 2nd in SEC).  
**Total offense:** 482.8 yards/game (4th in nation, 1st in SEC).  
**Rushing defense:** 93.3 yards/game (8th in nation, 2nd in SEC).  
**Pass-efficiency defense:** 115.5 points (36th in nation, 4th in SEC).  
**Total defense:** 334.8 yards/game (32nd in nation, 3rd in SEC).

## PIVOTAL MOMENT:

The insertion of true freshman tailback Jamal Lewis into the lineup was the spark the Vols needed. In Game 3, a 33-20 loss to Florida, Tennessee rushed for 45 yards. But Lewis became a starter in Game 4, and his emergence has made the passing attack that much more potent, because foes have to respect the run.



GREG GILBERT FOR TSN

**THE BEST YET:** The Wolverines haven't faced a quarterback as talented and deadly as Leaf.

# TSN PREVIEW ROSE BOWL

**MICHIGAN (11-0) vs. WASHINGTON STATE (10-1)** January 1, Pasadena, ABC, 5 p.m. ET

A victory would give Michigan its first national title since 1948 and the Big Ten's first since Ohio State won it all in 1968. Adding to the fun is that this is Washington State's first trip to Pasadena since the 1930 season. It all adds up to great drama for the last traditional Rose Bowl matchup before the "Granddaddy of Them All" becomes part of the Super Alliance next season.

The contest figures to come down to a matchup of two of the nation's best units: Washington State's offense against Michigan's defense. The only thing that has slowed the Cougars' attack has been a propensity for turnovers and penalties. Wazzu ranks 60th in the nation in turnover margin and finished the

regular season minus-1. Washington State should enter this game loose and free of pressure, which could eliminate the tendency to make errors. Coach Mike Price, TSN's Coach of the Year, is a players coach who maintains a relaxed atmosphere that allows his guys to do their thing.

Conversely, Michigan has to avoid being tight, as it enters the Rose Bowl unbeaten for the first time since the 1971 season. Coach Lloyd Carr has done a good job of keeping his players tuned in each week and has avoided a letdown, something that plagued the Wolverines the previous four seasons. But this is one of the biggest games in school history. Will Carr have his guys tense and playing scared?

## WHEN MICHIGAN HAS THE BALL

### Michigan's running game

This area was a huge concern entering the season, but it turned out to be the biggest surprise. At the top of the surprise list were redshirt freshmen Jeff Backus (tackle) and Steve Hutchinson (guard) on the left side. And the play of right guard Chris Ziemann has been a revelation when you consider he was on defense last season. Right tackle Jon Jansen is the star and center Zach Adami the lone senior starter. That quintet has made running fun for the trio of Chris Howard, Anthony Thomas and Clarence Williams.

**Key matchup:** This unit will face the best line it has seen this season. WSU's front is big, quick and capable of controlling a game, thanks to end Dorian Boose and tackle Leon Bender. Now isn't the time for Backus, a TSN first-team freshman All-American, and Hutchinson to play like they are first-year starters and allow penetration to clog the running lanes.

### WSU's run defense

It begins with 300-pound tackles Gary Holmes, who has battled a back problem, and Leon Bender. Those two are hard to push off the ball, and when you factor in middle linebacker Todd Nelson, the Cougars have a trio of thick, hard-to-move bodies in the interior. Michigan's lack of speed will prevent it from frequently turning the corner on ends Dorian Boose and Shane Doyle. Even if the Wolverines get to the perimeter, outside linebackers Brandon Moore and Steve Gleason possess the speed to run them down.

**Key matchup:** The Cougars likely won't respect Michigan's passing attack. That means they'll stack the line and play the run, making the battle of beef up front the key to Michigan's ability to move the ball and open the passing game. Keep an eye on how Wolverines guards Steve Hutchinson and Chris Ziemann fare against the Holmes-Bender duo.

### Michigan's passing game

Michigan's ground game sets up the air game, so the play-action pass is a chief weapon. Brian Griese has a weak arm and is slow, but he has been solid because he knows his limitations and makes few mistakes. When he does pass, Griese looks for tight end Jerame Tuman dragging across the middle or a running back in the flat. Receivers Tai Streets and Russell Shaw are usually window dressing, but if given the opportunity, they can do more than block.

**Key matchup:** This isn't a battle of strength on strength, but a big play could result and swing the momentum. WSU's secondary has been a weak link, so Michigan will be tempted to go deep on occasion. If the Cougars get too caught up in stopping the run, that could put corners Ray Jackson and Dee Moronkola in man coverage. And the Cougars don't appear to have anyone capable of matching up with Tuman.

### WSU's pass defense

This isn't an overly talented secondary, but it has benefited from a strong pass rush. Cornerbacks Ray Jackson, a big hitter with decent speed, and Dee Moronkola, the team's top defensive back, have been vulnerable to the big play. The Cougars have allowed 21 touchdown passes, but foes are completing only 48.3 percent of their passes with 18 interceptions. The late-season return of strong safety Duane Stewart from a knee injury has been a boon.

**Key matchup:** There isn't a lot to get excited about. Expect Michigan quarterback Brian Griese to test the secondary on occasion in an effort to open up the running game. But Jackson and Moronkola should be up to the task of handling Tai Streets and Russell Shaw. The pivotal battle will be the one pitting massive Wolverines tight end Jerame Tuman against Stewart, who has picked off five passes in the last two games.

### WOLVERINES DATA

#### 1997 results

Sept. 13	Colorado	W	27-3
Sept. 20	Baylor	W	38-3
Sept. 27	Notre Dame	W	21-14
Oct. 4	at Indiana	W	37-0
Oct. 11	Northwestern	W	23-6
Oct. 18	Iowa	W	28-24
Oct. 25	at Michigan State	W	23-7
Nov. 1	Minnesota	W	24-3
Nov. 8	at Penn State	W	34-8
Nov. 15	at Wisconsin	W	26-16
Nov. 22	Ohio State	W	20-14

### STARTING LINEUPS

#### Michigan offense

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht./Wt.
86	Tai Streets	WR	6-4/190
79	Jeff Backus	LT	6-6/285
76	Steve Hutchinson	LG	6-5/292
68	Zach Adami	C	6-5/296
52	Chris Ziemann	RG	6-7/283
77	Jon Jansen	RT	6-7/299
80	Jerame Tuman	TE	6-5/249
4	Russell Shaw	WR	6-0/186
14	Brian Griese	QB	6-3/207
8	Chris Howard	TB	5-11/215
7	Chris Floyd	FB	6-1/231
46	Kraig Baker	K	6-1/183

#### Washington State defense

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht./Wt.
90	Dorian Boose	WE	6-6/282
95	Gary Holmes	T	6-7/316
91	Leon Bender	T	6-5/299
46	Shane Doyle	SE	6-3/254
22	Brandon Moore	WLB	6-1/220
43	Todd Nelson	MLB	6-3/236
34	Steve Gleason	SLB	5-11/215
6	Dee Moronkola	CB	5-9/194
2	Ray Jackson	CB	6-1/210
25	Duane Stewart	SS	6-2/223
19	Lamont Thompson	FS	6-5/183
12	Jeff Banks	P	6-0/179

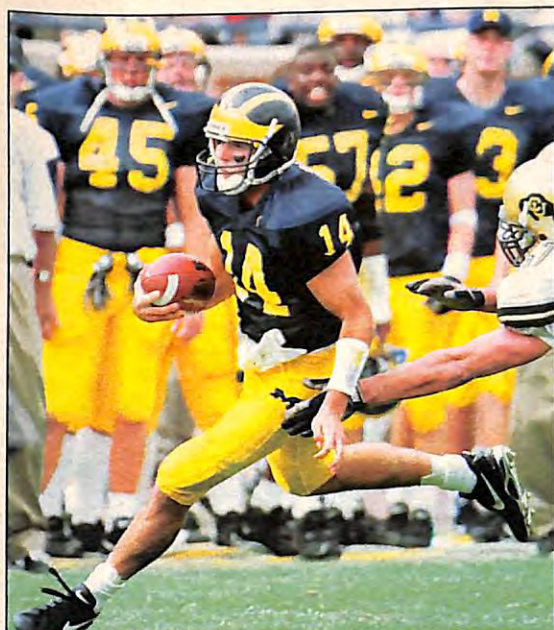
### STATS THAT MATTER

#### Michigan

**Rushing offense:** 187.3 yards/game (28th in nation, 5th in Big Ten).  
**Passing offense:** 201.2 yards/game (63rd in nation, 5th in Big Ten).  
**Total offense:** 388.5 yards/game (44th in nation, 5th in Big Ten).  
**Rushing defense:** 91.0 yards/game (7th in nation, 1st in Big Ten).  
**Pass-efficiency defense:** 75.8 points (1st in nation).  
**Total defense:** 206.9 yards/game (1st in nation).

## PIVOTAL MOMENT:

Brian Griese threw three first-half interceptions and watched visiting Iowa build a 21-7 halftime lead, but Michigan rallied to overcome four turnovers and poor special teams play. Griese threw three TD passes and ran for another, and the defense yielded three second-half points in Michigan's 28-24 victory.



**BRAINPOWER:** Griese can beat defenses in a variety of ways, but his best trait is his decision-making.



## Inside the Game With Kirk Herbstreit

Everybody is talking about the fact Michigan hasn't faced an offense like Washington State's and the Cougars haven't seen a defense like the Wolverines', and I agree. Michigan is going to sit back in a nickel package and play various schemes in hopes of stopping the prolific passing of Ryan Leaf. Michigan's defense does a great job disguising and mixing coverages, but Leaf has seen it all. It will be fun to see who wins this battle.

But to me, the Michigan offense versus the Washington State defense is just as interesting a showdown because I think the Wolverines' offense is tough to handle when it gets big chunks of yards on first down. This game is

going to be about Michigan and Brian Griese getting five and six yards on first down, putting the Wolverines in short-yardage situations and eating time. That will keep the ball away from Leaf and that dangerous offense. I'm giving Michigan the advantage to win because of its sharp focus and chemistry. Also, the Wolverines have a little more talent, and I think they're destined to win.

The Cougars can win if they make Michigan pay for playing a nickel package by establishing a ground game behind tailback Michael Black. If the Wolverines have to respect the run, Washington State's passing attack could take off.

## TSN VERDICT: Michigan 24, WSU 23

### WHEN WASHINGTON STATE HAS THE BALL

#### WSU's running game

Amid the flying footballs in Pullman this fall, Michael Black has carved out a nice niche as a strong between-the-tackles tailback. Black ran for 1,157 yards to provide nice balance to an attack that ranked second in the nation in total (502.2) and scoring offense (42.5). An underrated line that starts four seniors, including star guard Jason McEndoo and underrated counterpart Cory Withrow, played a big role in the success. But fumbles have been a problem; the Cougars have lost 15.

**Key matchup:** If WSU can't run, that will allow a fierce Michigan rush to attack the immobile Ryan Leaf. Thus, Black must be shielded from Michigan inside linebackers Sam Sword and Dhani Jones, the sparkplugs of the nation's top defense. McEndoo and Withrow need to neutralize that duo and create running lanes up the middle because Black often runs without benefit of a fullback.

#### Michigan's run defense

It doesn't get much better than this: The Wolverines allowed a Big Ten-low 91 yards per game. The key has been an active line led by end Glen Steele, the lone senior starter. Tackles Rob Renes and Josh Williams get penetration that allows inside linebackers Sam Sword and Dhani Jones to fill gaps and make plays. And just think: Two standouts were lost before the season; end David Bowens left the team because of academics and tackle Ben Huff was injured. Safeties Marcus Ray, the hardest hitter on the team, and Tommy Hendricks contribute heavily in run support.

**Key matchup:** Some wonder if the WSU offensive line can handle Michigan's physical style of play. These guys are big, strong and tough and will be a major test for the Cougars' blockers. The Wazzu linemen are large, but are they Big Ten tough? We'll find out. Whoever wins this battle wins the game.

#### WSU's passing game

Ryan Leaf may be the best quarterback in the nation. Besides size and toughness, Leaf has a terrific arm and can deliver the ball while getting hit. Plus, he's a leader. Leaf spreads the wealth by throwing to a corps of receivers dubbed the "Fab Five"—Shawn Tims, Shawn McWashington, Nian Taylor, Chris Jackson and Kevin McKenzie. If there is a star, it's Jackson. The quintet has caught 186 of Wazzu's 223 completions and accounted for 30 of the team's 34 TD receptions. McKenzie paces the team with 50 catches, and Jackson has 49.

**Key matchup:** If Leaf doesn't have time to pass, Wazzu is doomed. Tackles Ryan McShane and Rob Rainville are big, but not overly athletic. That means Michigan ends Glen Steele and James Hall could have field days. Expect the Wolverines to bring the blitz, too. But the Cougars have ample experience in picking up attacking defenders from all angles.

#### Michigan's pass defense

The secondary is suffocating. The Wolverines, who led the nation by allowing passers an efficiency rating of 75.8, yielded four touchdowns while intercepting 22 passes. Foes gained a national-low 1,275 yards because of the play of corners Charles Woodson, who led the Big Ten with seven interceptions, and Andre Weathers. Those two can lock up most receivers in man coverage, which allows safeties Marcus Ray and Tommy Hendricks to provide run support. Depth is an asset, as true freshmen James Whitley and William Peterson contribute in nickel situations.

**Key matchup:** At times, Ryan Leaf thinks he can complete any pass, which is why he has 10 interceptions. If Leaf tries to force the action against what may be the nation's top secondary, he could get burned—especially with Woodson looming. And if Cougars receivers can't get separation, it could be a long day for Wazzu.

#### COUGARS DATA

##### 1997 results

Aug. 30	UCLA	W	37-34
Sept. 13	at USC	W	28-21
Sept. 20	at Illinois	W	35-22
Sept. 27	Boise State	W	58-0
Oct. 4	at Oregon	W	24-13
Oct. 18	California	W	63-37
Oct. 25	Arizona (OT)	W	35-34
Nov. 1	at Arizona State	L	31-44
Nov. 8	SW Louisiana	W	77-7
Nov. 15	Stanford	W	38-28
Nov. 22	at Washington	W	41-35

#### STARTING LINEUPS

##### Washington State offense

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht./Wt.
81	Chris Jackson	WR	6-2/200
79	Rob Rainville	LT	6-5/305
66	Jason McEndoo	LG	6-5/293
62	Lee Harrison	C	6-2/266
71	Cory Withrow	RG	6-4/272
76	Ryan McShane	RT	6-6/305
20	Love Jefferson	TE	6-2/255
8	Shawn Tims	WR	5-11/182
16	Ryan Leaf	QB	6-6/238
5	Michael Black	TB	5-11/208
45	Shawn McWashington	WR	5-11/186
27	Rian Lindell	K	6-3/231

##### Michigan defense

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht./Wt.
81	Glen Steele	E	6-5/289
58	Rob Renes	NT	6-1/286
91	Josh Williams	T	6-3/271
56	James Hall	RLB	6-3/251
43	Clint Copenhaver	OLB	6-4/243
93	Sam Sword	ILB	6-2/242
55	Dhani Jones	ILB	6-2/225
30	Andre Weathers	CB	6-1/188
2	Charles Woodson	CB	6-1/198
29	Marcus Ray	SS	6-0/210
41	Tommy Hendricks	FS	6-2/205
38	Jason Vinson	P	6-2/191

#### STATS THAT MATTER

##### Washington State

**Rushing offense:** 157.7 yards/game (48th in nation, 5th in Pac-10).  
**Passing offense:** 344.5 yards/game (4th in nation, 1st in Pac-10).  
**Total offense:** 502.2 yards/game (2nd in nation, 1st in Pac-10).  
**Rushing defense:** 116.5 yards/game (27th in nation, 5th in Pac-10).  
**Pass-efficiency defense:** 104.1 points (17th in nation, 2nd in Pac-10).  
**Total defense:** 330.4 yards/game (30th in nation, 2nd in Pac-10).

## PIVOTAL MOMENT:

It was the first game of the year, but it was huge for Washington State. Trailing 34-31, UCLA drove 93 yards in 13 plays and faced a fourth-and-goal from the 1 with 2:48 left. Instead of trying for a tying field goal, the Bruins went for a touchdown, but Jermaine Lewis was stopped by tackle Leon Bender.



Tom Dienhart and Mike Huguenin

## Insider

## Burdened by the beast, Manning came up short

**T**he expectations on Peyton Manning were unrealistic this season. In fact, they were a beast. Manning tried to feed the beast; hey, he always wants to do the right thing.

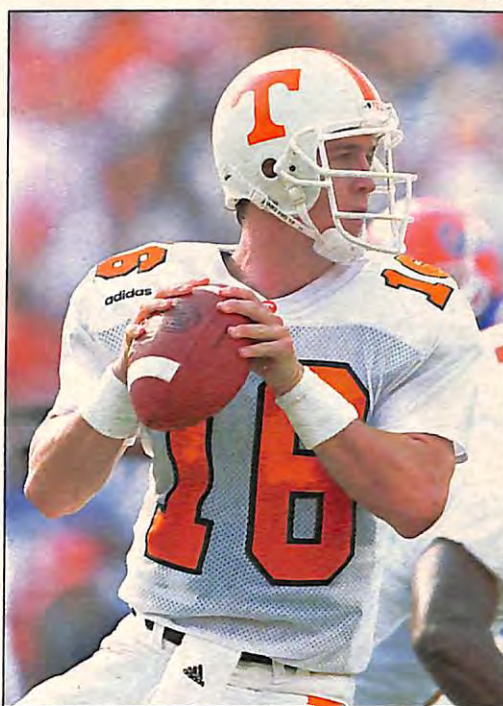
But it was an impossible task. It seemed no matter what Manning did each week, he couldn't satiate the beast. He fed it a career-high 523 passing yards against Kentucky; the beast wanted 550. He tossed four touchdown passes against Georgia; it wanted five. He served up a third consecutive victory over Alabama; the beast salivated for a win over Florida. As the *piece de resistance*, Manning cooked up an SEC title, Tennessee's first since 1990. And with it came a berth in the Orange Bowl, which may mean a shot at its first national title since 1951. That would quell the hunger of the beast, right? Nope. It had room for one more morsel—it wanted the Heisman Trophy.

Last March 5, all signs pointed toward Manning placing the 25-pound bronze bauble on the mantle in Archie and Olivia's house in New Orleans. How could he be denied after saying "no" to the NFL's millions and "yes" to one more year of running through the "T," checkerboard end zones and Smokey? Manning wanted one more year of life in jeans and a ballcap, one more year of building memories while lugging a backpack. He never said anything about wanting the Heisman. That is an individual award. He was concerned with winning a league title and maybe even a national crown.

But the beast of expectations was created and growing each week—and it expected the guy who finished sixth in balloting for the Heisman in 1995 and eighth in '96 to win it in 1997. This would be Manning's season—expectations said so.

With Manning placed on the peak of the college football globe, he should have been issued a cape in addition to his helmet and pads when he reported for two-a-days in August. But trying to be the greatest quarterback in the nation each week was too much to ask. It was too much to ask of anybody.

Manning started at the top and, thus, had nowhere to go but down. It wasn't his fault that he displayed so much talent, so much class and so much grace in his first three seasons in Knoxville that everyone was convinced his senior season was going to be the best of all. Expectations dictated it. After all, why wouldn't the guy



**HEISMAN RUNNER-UP:** Manning couldn't defeat the beast of expectations during the '97 season.

who threw for 7,382 yards and 53 touchdowns en route to leading the Volunteers to a 28-4 mark as a starter his first three campaigns be even better his last season?

Manning was doomed. His every move was scrutinized closely—perhaps too closely. Flaws, re-

gardless of their size, were bound to be discovered. It was impossible for him to achieve the standard media and fans had created.

Things started well in victories over Texas Tech and UCLA, but trouble hit. Manning failed to lead Tennessee to victory over those darned Florida Gators, who stole the Vols' milk money and pride for a fourth consecutive season. There was the 8-of-25 day against a mediocre South Carolina team. A less-than-50-percent passing day against Vanderbilt. All that, coupled with a season full of perfectly timed big plays in big games by Michigan cornerback Charles Woodson, conspired to deny Manning the Heisman.

Instead of having his portrait painted in oil and hung in the swanky Downtown Athletic Club, instead of joining the first family of college football, Manning became Tennessee's fourth Heisman Trophy runner-up.

Manning was the first to congratulate Woodson after he claimed the Heisman. A blank look of disappointment flushed Manning's face, but he maintained pride, poise and class—as usual.

## What's going on?

The perfect example of how to bungle a coaching change? USC athletic director Mike Garrett could write the book.

If you're going to get rid of your coach, don't you do it after the last regular-season game? In USC's case, that was November 22, when the Trojans lost to UCLA. Instead, Garrett waited until December 17 to get rid of John Robinson (and then he compounds the error by leaving word on an answering machine).

Then, Garrett hired Kansas City Chiefs offensive coordinator Paul Hackett—a USC assistant from 1976 to '80—to replace Robinson. You can question that, too, as Hackett was a bust as coach at the University of Pittsburgh (1990-92), going 13-20-1. Hackett seems to be one of those coaches who's better as an assistant than as a top man. Exactly who but Garrett thought Hackett was head-coaching material again?

To further muddle things, Garrett is allowing Hackett to finish the season with the Chiefs. That means Hackett won't be available to recruit until

the Chiefs lose in the NFL playoffs. We could be cynical and say that because it's the Chiefs, they'll be out early. But what if the Chiefs go to the Super Bowl? It's hard to imagine Hackett being too worried about his new job when his current team is in the biggest game of all.

Bottom line: Thumbs down to Garrett, who wasn't the most-liked guy by many Trojans alumni before this mess. **TSN**

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## Conference call

Here's a look at how each conference did against non-conference foes, against non-conference foes with winning records and against non-conference foes going to bowls. Conferences are ranked by winning percentage against non-conference teams with winning records:

Conference	vs. non-conference foes	vs. non-conference foes with winning records	vs. non-conference foes going to bowls
1. Southeastern	32-4	11-4	6-2
2. Big Ten	*25-11	8-6	5-5
3. Pacific-10	23-7	5-6	3-5
4. Big 12	*23-13	6-8	3-6
5. Atlantic Coast	*17-8	4-8	2-5
6. Western Athletic	*18-30	7-20	4-17
7. Big East	13-20	3-15	2-10
8. Big West	*4-22	2-15	0-11
9. Mid-American	*9-21	2-16	2-13
10. Conference USA*	14-21	1-14	0-10

\*Denotes that at least one non-conference game was played against a Division I-AA team, and those games were not counted. A breakdown: Big West schools played 10 I-AA foes; WAC schools played six I-AA foes; MAC schools played four I-AA foes; ACC schools played two I-AA foes; and Big Ten and Big 12 schools played one I-AA foe.

# inside dish

CAMPUS RUMBLINGS AND LOCKER ROOM WHISPERS  
FROM TOM DIENHART AND MIKE HUGUENIN

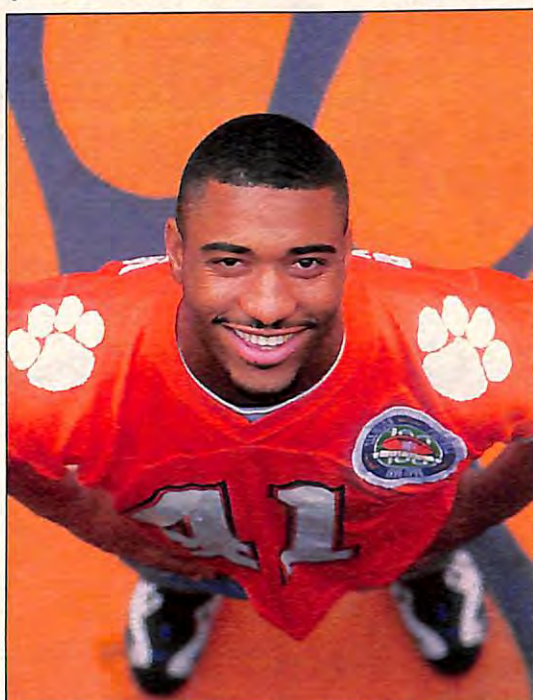
Oklahoma State got a huge oral commitment from quarterback **Matt Holliday**, considered by some recruiting analysts as the best pro-style passer among high school players. The Cowboys had a built-in advantage; Holliday's dad, **Tom**, is the school's baseball coach. Matt Holliday also is considered a first-round baseball pick, but he's expected to turn down a big-money baseball deal to play both sports in college.

Word is that Florida coach **Steve Spurrier** will rotate quarterbacks **Noah Brindise** and **Doug Johnson** against Penn State in the Citrus Bowl, as he did against Florida State in the Gators' 32-29 upset. ... New Kent coach **Dean Pees** is stepping into a less-than-ideal situation. The Golden Flashes have not won more than three games in a season since 1988 and have only two winning seasons since 1973. In addition, no coach has lasted more than four seasons since **Trevor Rees** left in 1963. Pees, who had been Michigan State's defensive coordinator, inherits a high-powered offense (442.4 yards per game in '97) keyed by quarterback **Jose Davis** (32 TD passes). But a woeful defense allowed an average of 488.8 yards.

The junior college signing period started December 17 and ends January 15. The nation's best JC offensive player is running back **Frank Murphy**, who still is deciding on a school. The best JC defensive player? Depending on whom you ask, it's lineman **Alvin McKinley** (heading to Mississippi State), cornerback **Reggie Durden** (Florida State) or outside linebacker **Troy West** (Nebraska or Oklahoma). West is from Bradenton (Fla.) Manatee, the same school that produced former Huskers star **Tommie Frazier** and current Huskers wingback **Shevin "Big Foot" Wiggins**.

... SMU received an oral commitment from linebacker **Marcus Mosley** of South Oak Cliff High in Dallas. He is considered one of the top three defensive players in Texas. If Mosley signs with the Mustangs, he'll be SMU's most-ballyhooed recruit since pre-death penalty days. ... East Carolina running back **Scott Harley** and Washington center **Olin Kreutz** already have announced they're going pro early. Others likely to go beyond the obvious (**Ryan Leaf**, **Curtis Enis**, **Ricky Williams**, etc.): Florida wide receiver **Jacquez Green** and Clemson linebacker **Anthony Simmons**. Washington QB **Brock Huard** is another possibility.

USC had gotten an oral commitment from L.A.-



SEE YOU LATER: Don't be surprised if Clemson's Simmons bypasses his last year of eligibility.

area quarterback **Jason Thomas**, a phenomenal athlete who is considered one of the top 10 quarterbacks in the nation. But **Paul Hackett's** hiring as coach could mean Thomas goes elsewhere. Thomas is extremely close to USC offensive coordinator **Hue Jackson**, and it's uncertain whether Jackson will be retained by the new regime. ... Ahhh, the vagaries of recruiting. **David Terrell**, of Richmond, Va., is one of the nation's top three wide receiver recruits. Terrell originally committed to Notre Dame, but it's said the school

hadn't approved his transcript. Last week, Terrell reportedly committed orally to Michigan. And there's the case of wide receiver **John Capel**, from Brooksville, Fla. Capel, a nationally ranked sprinter who might be the fastest high school football player in the nation, has orally committed to South Carolina, Florida and Miami. ... Alabama coach **Mike DuBose** lured UNLV offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach **Charlie Stubbs** to Tuscaloosa to coach the Tide quarterbacks. Alas, even with the pass-happy Stubbs on board, it may be more of the same for ground-bound Alabama. The reason? Offensive line coach **Neil Callaway**, a **Bear Bryant**/**Pat Dye** kind of guy, was promoted to offensive coordinator.

All-world QB **Ronald Curry** has set recruiting visits to North Carolina and Florida State. Curry says his commitment to Virginia is solid, but who knows?

## TSN Free Agents Basketball

who can be claimed after 2 PM on Monday, Dec. 29th, and before 9 PM on Sunday, Jan. 4th, and be on your team for games beginning Monday, Jan. 5th.

PO ID	PLAYER / TEAM	SALARY
G 117	Nick Van Exel, LA Lakers	.....\$3,090,000
G 164	Brent Barry, LA Clippers	.....\$1,590,000
F 304	Charles Barkley, Houston	.....\$3,530,000
F 430	Ron Mercer, Boston	.....\$1,300,000
C 503	David Robinson, San Antonio	.....\$3,960,000

## Hockey

who can be claimed after 9 AM on Friday, Dec. 26th, and before 5 PM on Wednesday, Dec. 31st, and be on your team for games beginning Friday, Jan. 2nd.

PO ID	PLAYER / TEAM	SALARY
G 37	Tommy Salo, NY Islanders	.....\$670,000
C 103	Peter Forsberg, Colorado	.....\$2,620,000
W 415	Pat Verbeek, Dallas	.....\$2,000,000
W 528	Valeri Bure, Montreal	.....\$890,000
D 804	Niklas Lidstrom, Detroit	.....\$1,590,000
D 838	Teppo Numminen, Phoenix	.....\$910,000

## TSN FANTASY CHALLENGE LEADERS IN THE RACE FOR CASH!

### \$25,000 FOOTBALL CASH GRAND PRIZE THRU 12/15

1	Paul Melotik	.....Whitefish Bay, WI
2	Bill Miller	.....Indianapolis, IN
3	Rob Martin	.....Barnhart, MO
4	Jerry Kishineff	.....Napa, CA
5	Ron Ugarte	.....Warren, NJ
6	Steven Hayes	.....Natick, MA
7	Stephen Kleffner	.....Spalding, NE
8	Chris Marchese	.....Brooklyn, NY
9	Mark Jehle	.....Wesley Chapel, FL
10	Brian McMullin	.....Sequim, WA

### \$10,000 BASKETBALL CASH GRAND PRIZE THRU 12/14

1	Wycoff / Astor	.....Madison Heights, MI
2	Jon Berenson	.....Providence, RI
3	Darryl Anderson	.....Plainfield, CT
4	B / M McComas	.....Fort Wayne, IN
5	Osswald / Beeskau	.....Modesto, CA
6	Osswald / Beeskau	.....Modesto, CA
7	Dan Manning	.....Indianola, IA
8	Tom Dudman	.....Van Nuys, CA
9	Gary Kreutz	.....Edmonton, ALB
10	S / K Carter	.....Memphis, TN

### \$10,000 HOCKEY CASH GRAND PRIZE THRU 12/11

1	Faltin / Schneiker	.....Moerfelden, GER
2	David Beckman	.....Battelford, SAS
3	David Beckman	.....Battelford, SAS
4	Longmore / Bailey	.....Columbia, MO
5	M / E Shepherd	.....Toledo, OH
6	Chris Reardon	.....Encinitas, CA
7	Michael Cascio	.....New Hyde Park, NY
8	Anthony Cascio	.....Ridgewood, NY
9	M / K Sebastian	.....Victoria, BC
10	Francis Gagnon	.....Lachine, QUE

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**O**ne sunny south Florida afternoon, a few students gathered outside the LaSalle High School gym, their faces pressed against the tinted windows, their hands cupped over their eyes. They know the Heat practice here, and they are staring in wonder at the big man with the big muscles sitting in the foyer, who must be Alonzo Mourning. Sometimes they tap on the glass, sometimes they call his name, but mostly they stare, wondering just who the big guy is—and what the big guy is thinking. Which is fitting, because for the past four years, almost everyone in the NBA has done the same.

But on this September day, two days before he is to have surgery to repair torn ligaments in his left knee that would sideline him for nearly the first two months of the season, Mourning is, in his own guarded way, opening up. He is smiling and laughing, and it all seems so strange. Mourning, who hates talking to reporters, is probably just pretending to be nice. But at least he's trying.

"People keep talking about my facial expressions," Mourning says. "Everybody makes facial expressions when they play. What's the big deal about mine? Do I really scowl? What scowl? Everybody plays with intensity."

That famous intensity is the first and final word about Alonzo Mourning, who returned to action last week. It has made him the franchise player of the Heat, who continue to grow stronger as title contenders. And it still makes him a target, even after five seasons in the NBA, because opponents know how easy it is to yank his chain and bruise his psyche.

His coaches gingerly talk about controlling it. Opponents talk about exploiting it, and Detroit assistant Johnny Bach, who coached Mourning for two years as an assistant in Charlotte, says the center is so intense he reminds him of Jake La Motta, the tortured middleweight champion who was portrayed in the film *Raging Bull*.

Mourning knows that intensity, which often brings out his best, can also bring out his worst. But he says he's trying. Trying to stay upbeat and not become so moody. Trying not to let his mind disappear to where even his wife, Tracy, can't find him.

"I used to beat myself up inside," he says. "If I had played bad, or even if I played OK and we lost, I felt terrible. But now my son, Trey (Dad's nickname for Alonzo III, who is 1½), has changed my perspective. I look at him, and he's the best thing that's ever happened to me, and he's helped me cope with adversity."

# ALL THE RAGE

**The Heat's title chances may hinge on whether Alonzo Mourning can learn to harness the intensity that fuels his game** **By Steve Harrison**

**W**ith Mourning injured (he was the most vocal cheerleader on the bench, naturally) the Heat still were 15-7. Although the Heat seemingly didn't miss a step—thanks to backup center Isaac Austin's brilliant play, as well as a more assertive Jamal Mashburn—there was a cause for concern. The team was missing its one staple from last year: defense.

"They've opened things up," Magic G.M. John Gabriel says. "Austin has given them a good in-between game. But on the other hand, the defense isn't the same."

Last season, opponents scored 89.3 points a game; this year Miami is giving up 94.9. The Heat also have blown leads, such as the 17-point, first-half cushion they frittered away in a home loss to Milwaukee on November 29. Part of the problem? New players such as Terry Mills haven't learned Riley's system. The biggest problem? No "Zo."

"He's an unorthodox player," Riley says of Mourning. "He's got a big heart, and his will to win is why he stays ahead. He comes early and stays late. He was the flash point for everything we did last season."

Mourning, who looked tentative but scored 24 points, grabbed nine rebounds and blocked four shots against the Wizards in his season debut, will be the flash point for long-term success this year. But his return poses three questions. First, can Riley play Austin (who may be traded this year because the Heat don't have the cap

space to re-sign him) and Mourning in the lineup at once? Second, how long will it take the Miami offense to adjust from Austin, who can play a more freewheeling style, to Mourning, who is more statuesque and who has yet to gain all his strength back?

Third, and the biggest question: Has Mourning matured—"dealt with adversity," as he says—since his last appearance, Game 5 of the Eastern Conference Finals against Chicago?

That series was a miserable end to what was Mourning's finest year as a pro. Though he wasn't called on to score as much as in Charlotte, he averaged 19.8 points, 9.9 rebounds and 2.9 blocks during the regular season. He led the Heat to 61 wins, a team record, and clearly established himself as one of the league's top centers. Mourning and his delirious work ethic proved to be the perfect complement to Riley, who runs practice like a sweatshop.

## Thinking big

Last season, Alonzo Mourning called teammate Isaac Austin the best backup center in the league. This season, Austin is receiving even bigger praise. "He's definitely one of the 10 best centers in the league," Orlando's Rony Seikaly says. Mourning believes Austin, who is averaging 18.2 points and 8.7 rebounds, deserves to be considered for the All-Star Game.

Because of Austin's effectiveness, coach Pat Riley recently has been considering a permanent lineup that would have Austin at power forward. P.J. Brown, who is averaging 8.0 rebounds, would move from power forward to small forward and Jamal Mashburn would shift to shooting guard, in place of Voshon Lenard, who only recently has showed signs of emerging from a shooting slump.

But against Chicago, the Bulls crawled inside Mourning's head and raised hell. They threw three different defenders at him—Brian Williams, Dennis Rodman and Luc Longley—and Mourning looked like a poor guy stranded on the freeway.

"If a guy has to rely just on a low-post game," Gabriel says, "(he'll) struggle in the playoffs."

With Riley in charge, it was logically assumed in some circles the Heat eventually would dethrone Chicago. But after Mourning's playoff performance, there were worries: Could Miami's \$105 million man lead the charge?

Mourning isn't graceful on offense—"Like his mind, even his body is tortured when he drives to the basket," Bach says—but his defense is and always will be superb. His major shortcomings are as much mental as physical. Passing out of double-teams. Turnovers. Silly fouls. Free-throw shooting. He shot a dismal 56 percent in the playoffs.

Mourning, like most athletes, isn't one to second-guess himself with a stranger. But when he is asked what he needs to do to improve, his smile vanishes as if a switch has been flipped inside his head.

"I have been working on all parts of my game," Mourning says. "Before the season, I like to prepare myself for challenges. And as far as free throws, that won't happen again. Believe me."

For Riley, the trick is to harness the rage without ruining the player. Without his intensity, Mourning is merely

another center with muscles. With it, he can be unstoppable—unless he stops himself.

"You are trying to get guys in this league to give their all, and 90 percent of them aren't interested," Riley says. "I don't want to change any of that, but I want 'Zo to become more controlled. I want him to learn how to use it. How to channel it."

"All of us are rooting for 'Zo to find that peace of mind," Bach says. "He has to have the confidence that short-term failure is not long-term failure. But he's just not letting go of that fury."

**W**hether that will happen is anyone's guess. Mourning certainly has matured since his first game as a Hornet, when he wanted to succeed so badly he tried to do everything himself. Still, it's tough to really know. Because, except for his close circle, which includes former Georgetown centers Patrick Ewing and Dikembe Mutombo, the big guy is a vault.

"Will 'Zo ever open up?" asked Hornets trainer Terry Kofler, who got to know Mourning when the two worked together in Charlotte. "I don't see that happening."

Which is a shame because there is more than the scowl. There is the man who is universally respected by his team for his work ethic. There is the man who can talk about more than basketball. (Being a Georgetown alum will do that to you.) There is the man who is one of the most generous athletes around.

Mourning is one of 49 children raised by foster parent Fannie Threat in Chesapeake, Va., a woman Mourning compares to Mother Teresa. In part because of Threat's influence, he has made a commitment to helping others. Mourning gives to several charities, though he tries to keep many of his contributions private.

"I don't need the recognition for the things I do. God put me on the earth and blessed me with talents, but he also put me here to help people," Mourning says. "He didn't put me here to get recognition."

Which is how Mourning plays, critics be damned. And though he says he's a calmer, less tortured guy—a dad—don't think for a minute the scowl is lost.

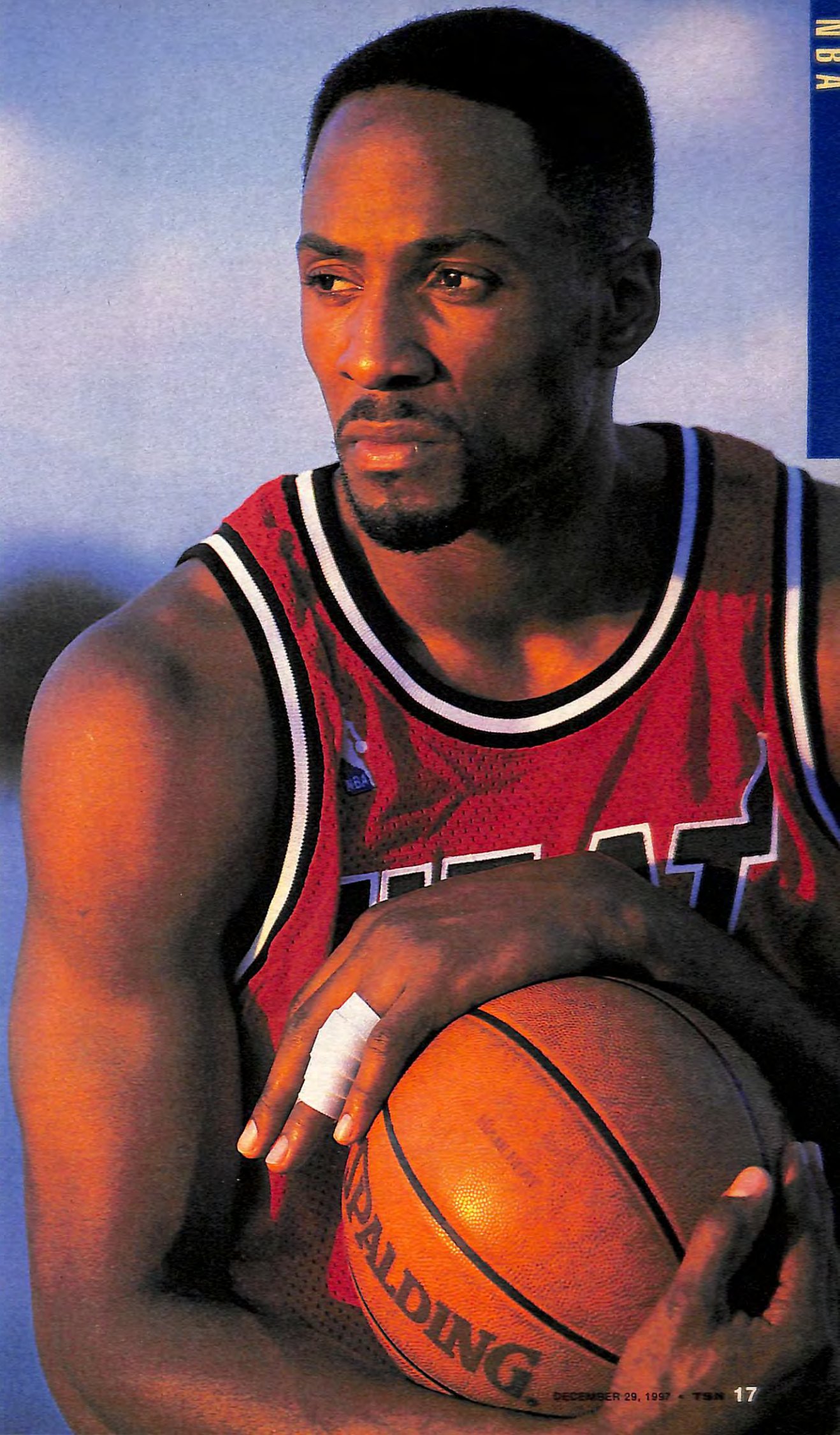
"When I play this game," Mourning says, "it's not about how many cars or clothes I can get. If you're in it, why not try as hard as you can and get something out of it?"

**TSN**

*Steve Harrison is a writer based in Fort Lauderdale.*

**GOING INSIDE:** Mourning keeps a tight hold of his emotions off the court, a bold contrast to the fury he shows on it.

ROBERT SEALE/TSN





## Insider

Dave D'Alessandro

# The Stackhouse deal can bring merriment to all

**T**is the holiday season—it must be, because everyone seems to be getting exactly what he wanted.

Jerry Stackhouse, for one, finally got his parole from

Philadelphia, where everyone focused on what he couldn't do—petty stuff, such as defending, shooting, and handling—rather than on the fact that he can score 20 points per game.

Eric Montross got to run away from failure, embraced by a new coach who says he has a bright future—a situation he has encountered in his career about as often as a postgame shower.

Aaron McKie got to go home again, to the very place where he left whatever confidence he once had in his game.

Theo Ratliff received a chance to increase his market value, so he can actually justify turning down the six-year, \$18 million deal he thumbed his nose at last summer.

The 76ers got to change their chemistry—dramatically—and start their purge in earnest.

And the Pistons got Stackhouse for a 57-game audition, with the hope he can jump-start the league's most moribund offense.

So what we have is—Hark!—a deal that works for both sides. Not to mention a deal we're having some trouble getting excited about.

Indeed, the Sixers and Pistons probably improved themselves for very different reasons, but when it all shakes out, half the players involved may be playing elsewhere next season and the other half could be worse off for the experience.

First, Philly. In two full seasons and seven weeks of a third, the Sixers compiled a 46-140 record with Stackhouse—the fellow once deemed their savior, the next Jordan, the cornerstone, whatever—in their lineup. Even Stackhouse admits, "It was time to shake up things a little bit. Sometimes, it's not the addition of a player, it's the subtraction."

Indeed, it's a chemistry move for the Sixers, who had compiled a year's worth of evidence that Stackhouse and Allen Iverson could not coexist. Overnight, things happened quickly: Jimmy Jackson moved back to shooting guard, Ratliff and Scott Williams shared the center minutes, Derrick Coleman returned to claim his power forward spot, Tim Thomas became the starting small forward and Clarence Weatherspoon moved one step closer to the exit.

A lot of this is about Thomas, the erratic rookie skywalker. In brief glimpses, he has proved to be a fearless slasher of the first order, with energy to burn. It's time to find out what he can do, at the expense of Weatherspoon—who, not coinciden-



**SQUARE PEG:** Stackhouse, once considered the Sixers' savior, never fit into the team's chemistry.

tally, didn't play a minute in the first half against Miami last Friday.

But it's only the start of Sixers Purge '97-98. Pat Croce, whose excess energy is not necessarily a good attribute in an owner, is said to have lost all patience with this team. Word is he wants to tear it up and start over ASAP. And, well, yes: Word is out that if it includes moving Iverson, so be it.

As for the Pistons, they moved out two players—shot blocker Ratliff and Temple product McKie—with great limitations for one player (Stackhouse) with great but unfulfilled expectations. Stackhouse is in a better position now—hardly the shooter you want at shooting guard

but someone other than Grant Hill who can get to the rim and give a team a boost in the open court. With Joe Dumars and Lindsey Hunter shooting a combined 34 percent, the Pistons needed immediate help and got it. They also got Montross, who won't command any double teams when he is allowed to touch the ball (every other week or so) but will at least defend the post and allow Brian Williams to move back to power forward.

Now come the test drives. If Stackhouse isn't the answer, the Pistons will allow him to search elsewhere for that \$70 million contract he supposedly wants. They still have plenty of money to spend next summer, with or without him, and by then they can at least judge whether he is worth his price.

The Sixers, meanwhile, can decide whether there was simply too much congestion at the wrong position and whether Ratliff is worth a long-term commitment. But most of all, they'll find out whether Croce's impatience is justified.

## An unlikely ally

The last Latrell Sprewell item for a while—promise. Besides, this says less about him than it does about another man's compassion.

Sprewell once chased former Warriors teammate Jerome Kersey with a two-by-four, and after being restrained, threatened to return after practice with a gun. So you'd think that Kersey wouldn't exactly be the defense's star witness in the upcoming arbitration, but he doesn't exactly hurt Sprewell's case, either.

"Spre, you know, he's a good guy," Kersey said after a week of silence. "I played with him for a year, and I like him. He's a fiery guy. That's part of his competitive spirit. Maybe his competitive spirit got him in a little trouble this time, or a lot of trouble."

"I don't know what the severity of the penalty should be. There should be a penalty, definitely, because you can't have guys in the league jumping on head coaches or jumping on other players. But I agree with what most people say: I don't think they did it very fairly ... You just can't take a guy's whole life away."

## Poised for stardom

There are a lot of things to like about Keith Van Horn, and they often come across in the way his Nets teammates act around the rookie who could be their meal ticket for some time. Jayson Williams says, "He's the reason I'm still here. I saw him in the summer and I said, 'Whoa, I better make up with Cal,' " he says, referring to coach John Calipari.

But we like Van Horn for his response to Brian Williams' allegation that he receives preferential treatment from officials because Van Horn is the "Great White Hope."

Van Horn dealt with it nicely, explaining that favoritism is wrong, that a foul is a foul, and that such a statement requires no response. By the end of the day, he had Williams apologizing. "He said he didn't hate me or anything," Van Horn says. "He's a good guy." **TSN**

Dave D'Alessandro covers the NBA for the Newark (N.J.) *Star-Ledger*. E-mail him at [daved@sportingnews.com](mailto:daved@sportingnews.com).

## The book on Antonio Daniels

Grizzlies, G, 6-4 / 195

On opening night against the Mavericks, Daniels had a chance to win the game as time expired. He missed a 3-pointer. One month later in Detroit, Daniels found himself in the same situation. This time in the dying seconds, he drove and scored, leading his team to its only win during a five-game trip.

"I told you guys (after the opener) that if I had the chance to take a winning shot again I would because I think that's the kind of player you have to be to make it in this league," he said afterward. That steadfast confidence has helped Daniels, the fourth overall pick last June out of Bowling Green, grow as a starting point guard while the young Grizzlies struggle to find their way.

The team eventually expects Daniels to be able to use his height and long arms to post up smaller point guards. For now, the club merely wants him to get a feel for the offense and focus on distributing the ball.

Still, Daniels, who entered the week averaging 9.2 points and 5.4 assists, has shown the ability to score down low, not off post-ups but off drives, with a knack



MICHAEL CAULFIELD/AP

for putting in short runners and flip shots. From the outside, his range is about 18-20 feet (he has hit three of his 18 3-point attempts). Daniels hasn't always spotted open teammates on his drives, though he is improving in this area.

As Daniels and others will admit, it is only when he stops thinking and lets the game flow through

him that he will play at the level most envision him to reach. "He reminds me of myself eight years ago," Seattle's Gary Payton says. "He's just got to learn the game. He's got to play against good players like myself, the Hardaways and all of them."

Coach Brian Hill, who knows of the rough initiation rookie point guards go through, has been picking his spots with Daniels, making sure the rookie saw just enough time in critical junctures of games. But because of the recent groin injury to backup Lee Mayberry, Daniels is likely to get a lot more minutes.

He will experience more discouraging moments, too, such as the Mavs game. But Daniels has one constant in his favor. "I always have an optimistic attitude," he says. —Howard Tsumura

## TSN's Power Poll

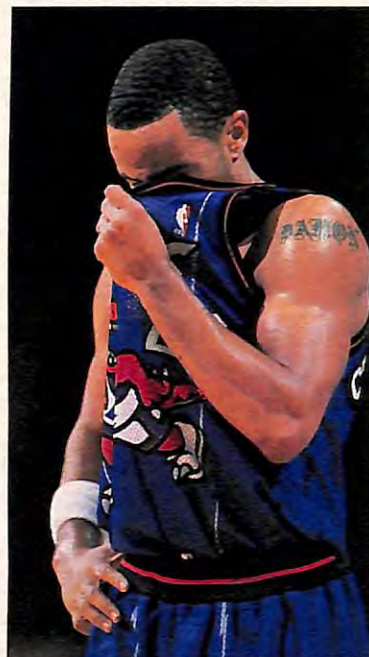
Rk.	Team	W-L	Comment
1.	Seattle	21-5	It's amazing what good chemistry can do.
2.	L.A. Lakers	20-6	Shaq has been the league's highest-paid cheerleader.
3.	Atlanta	19-7	Recasner giving Blaylock some much-needed rest.
4.	Miami	17-8	With Mourning inside, Heat should get even more open 3s.
5.	Indiana	17-8	Pacers are beginning to be as mentally tough as their coach.
6.	Chicago	16-9	Stat of the year: Rodman has only two technicals.
7.	Phoenix	15-8	With KJ down, Nash is getting time to shine.
8.	Houston	14-8	Willis is holding this team together.
9.	Utah	15-9	The hole in the middle keeps growing.
10.	Cleveland	15-9	Anderson is making a strong bid for the starting lineup.
11.	Charlotte	15-9	Cowens wisely has put ball back in hands of Mason and Rice.
12.	Portland	14-9	O'Neal and Dunleavy just aren't clicking.
13.	Orlando	16-10	You can't blame the poor interior defense on injuries.
14.	San Antonio	15-10	Person's shooting has been a huge disappointment.
15.	New York	15-11	It's time for Dudley to earn his money.
16.	New Jersey	13-11	Van Horn isn't Bird, but he's close enough for the Nets.
17.	Washington	13-14	Strickland is the only player averaging 10 assists per game.
18.	Milwaukee	12-13	One thing is certain: Allen isn't a point guard.
19.	Boston	11-12	Brown takes Billups' place in the Pitino doghouse.
20.	Minnesota	11-13	Why is reaching .500 still a problem?
21.	Detroit	12-15	Stackhouse wants to impress—he can start with defense.
22.	Vancouver	9-17	Thorpe is the glue to the front line.
23.	Sacramento	9-17	Polynice wants to be traded? Take a number.
24.	Philadelphia	6-18	Will Stackhouse deal mean Iverson gets even more shots?
25.	Dallas	5-20	Mavs can lose just as bad without the triangle as with it.
26.	L.A. Clippers	5-21	Wright is emerging as a dependable rebounder.
27.	Golden State	5-18	Maybe Smith can be a go-to guy after all.
28.	Toronto	3-23	In a league of haves and have-nots, Raptors have little.
29.	Denver	2-22	This team could win the NCAA championship. Maybe.

Records are through Saturday's games. The NBA Power Poll is determined by TSN editors and columnist Dave D'Alessandro.

## inside dish

FRONT OFFICE  
RUMBLINGS  
AND LOCKER  
ROOM  
WHISPERS

Sacramento's Olden Polynice lost his job to Michael "Ball Boy" Stewart last week, and his immediate response was to march into vice president Geoff Petrie's office and demand a trade. Petrie's response was something along the lines of, "Nobody wants you." ... Jason Kidd—gutting it out with a bone bruise in his knee lately—remains hopeful Phoenix eventually will be Scottie Pippen's work address. But he has been told to cool it with the public recruitment of Mr. Limbo. ... Chuck Daly called NBA security chief Horace Balmer to report that he and his players received some phone inquiries while in L.A. a few weeks back. The caller said he worked for the NBA and made inquiries about certain players. Balmer suspects the calls were from a well-known gambler in the



ROBERT SEALE/TSN

**NOWHERE TO HIDE: Stoudamire is stuck with a bad offense.**

L.A. area. Those types of calls are more common than you think. ... Who did Converse choose to replace the fired Latrell Sprewell as the new national spokesman for its basketball line? Denver rookie Bobby Jackson. Clearly, the company wanted to stick with a household name. Damon Stoudamire appears close to losing it, even asking out of a recent game ("I've had enough of this," he told coach Darrell Walker) just so he wouldn't have to be associated with the awful offense the Raptors are running. Stoudamire also issued this ultimatum: Get players now. "It's obvious that we need components to better ourselves as a team," he says. "I think they need to address these issues for me to want to stay here, or for that case for anybody to want to even come and play here. You have no idea how crazy this is making me." ... Pat Riley admits he made a mistake in the way he handled Todd Day. Riley recently blasted the player for his me-first attitude in front of the entire team and then cut him on the spot. ... Crime and Punishment: In the four games before the moment his right hand was viciously assaulted by Tracy Murray's face, Rod Strickland was averaging 17 points and 11 assists and shooting 53 percent. In the four games after Strickland had his wrist and fingers mangled by Murray's frontal lobe, the numbers were 9.5, 8.7 and 25.

## Simply flawless

Make fewer mistakes than your opponent, and you'll win. It may be an oversimplified approach to the game, but it's one the Pacers are taking to heart under the leadership of Larry Bird.

By reducing defensive lapses, cutting down on turnovers and ill-advised shots and hitting their free throws, Indiana, after a 2-5 start, has gone 15-3 and entered the week 1½ games behind the Hawks in the Central. "I don't know if anybody is playing better in the East right now," Pistons coach Doug Collins says.

On offense, the Pacers are deliberate—the team averages the fewest shots per game in the league (74.7)—but precise. Point guard Mark Jackson is averaging five assists for every turnover, and forward Chris Mullin has improved the flow with his timely passes. Center Rik Smits, who had surgery on both feet last year, is looking remarkably nimble and consistently hitting jump-hooks and 20-footers alike to ease the scoring burden on Reggie Miller. And Jalen Rose has blossomed by playing three positions off the bench (small forward and both guard spots) instead of one.



**PASS PERFECT:** Jackson is providing exactly what the Pacers need.

The Pacers also are making teams pay at the line, improving from 21st in the league in foul shooting last season to second this year.

The biggest surprise about the team is its defense. The players have taken to the preaching of Bird and assistant Dick Harter about helping each other, which is essential because Indiana is one of the least athletic clubs in the league. The Pacers have been moving in packs, and that approach has helped Jackson and Mullin considerably. Entering the week, the team ranked fifth in fewest points allowed (89.2). "Our centers are willing to come out on the court—if we double-team the ball—and pick up the open man," Bird says, "and guys are willing to rotate down."

The Pacers go through long, hard practices, but Bird's style—he blends humor and praise with his stern challenges—has made the sessions easy to swallow. "You know what he wants, and he has a way of telling you with a smile," Miller says.

Leave it to Bird to make the game look so simple.

## Giant loss

The Rockets have been rolling without Hakeem Olajuwon. The Jazz survived without John Stockton. The Heat won without Alonzo Mourning. The Lakers are making do without Shaq. Even the Bulls have begun to thrive recently without Scottie Pippen.

Now it's the Knicks' turn to cope.

The loss of Patrick Ewing to a dislocated wrist (the club said last Sunday he would miss the rest of the season and may not even fully recover by next season) is a much more devastating blow to New York than the aforementioned injuries were to the other teams, because, unlike the others, the Knicks don't have a backup at the position who can take up the scoring slack.

Chris Dudley and Buck Williams, who were expected to alternate at center, are outstanding defenders, but they won't come close to making up for Ewing's 20.8 points per game.

Still, the team won't bottom out like last year's David Robinson-less Spurs and still can emerge as a playoff spoiler. New York entered the season as one of the deepest, most experienced clubs in the league, and coach Jeff Van Gundy still has a few weapons, albeit perimeter ones, at his disposal. He has enough defensive muscle to go to an even slower tempo to grind out games, à la the Cavs of recent seasons. Or he could take advantage of his wealth of shooters by freeing John Starks and Allan Houston more and going to a full-court game (Van Gundy used a small lineup last week with some success).

Either way, the heaviest burden may fall on Larry Johnson, who is now the team's only legitimate low-post threat.

## Off the rim

■ **SIGN LANGUAGE:** This could be the start of a beautiful relationship. The Cavs' Shawn Kemp says he already is beginning to click with rookie point guard Brevin Knight. "I didn't have to say anything to Gary Payton when I wanted the ball," says Kemp, who played with the Sonics guard for eight seasons. "I could just give him a little signal. It's getting to that point here."

■ **STEPPING UP:** Pippen or no Pippen, the Bulls are looking more like their old selves. A key: Toni Kukoc's lingering foot injury (plantar fasciitis) is nearly 90 percent healed. He is second in the league in 3-point shooting, at 46 percent. His career percentage from the arc: 34. The Bulls entered the week having won eight of their last 10. Then again, isn't this about the time when Dennis explodes?



**OSTERTAG:** Running into problems—on his bench.

■ **OFF CENTER:** It continues to be a rough year for Utah's Greg Ostertag. In training camp, he was scolded by Karl Malone for being out of shape. And early in the season, he was slapped by Shaq. Last week, coach Jerry Sloan ordered him to the locker room during a game against the Wizards after the two argued on the bench.

■ **TOUGH ENOUGH?** The Timberwolves' Kevin Garnett has begun to hear criticism that he shies away from contact and shoots too many fallaways when he is challenged. The Nuggets recently beat the Wolves by having rookie Danny Fortson bully Garnett.

this week

# online

### Power up for NFL playoffs

Why can't the Broncos stop the run? Can the Packers win without a healthy Reggie White and Gilbert Brown? What makes the Steelers so dangerous in the red zone? The NFL playoffs are here, and TSN has all the answers. We'll have team-by-team histories and in-depth scouting reports on each playoff team, as well as the usual crop of experts and the ever-popular head-to-head matchups.

AOL  
exclusive!

### Talk with the experts!

Christmas was great, but did you get everything you wanted? TSN has a few more stocking stuffers for you in our AOL chat rooms: Buddy Ryan provides the NFL playoff scoop on December 30 at 8 p.m. ET; Mike Keenan hits the ice on January 2 at 9 p.m. ET; and Mike DeCourcy talks college hoops every Sunday at 11 p.m. ET.

### Sounds of the hardwood

Can't get to the game? Can't get the game on TV? TSN and AudioNet bring you the sounds of the top 20 college basketball games each week on our website. This week's featured cybercasts: North Carolina-Georgia, Kentucky-Louisville, UCLA-UNLV.

[www.sportingnews.com](http://www.sportingnews.com)—AOL keyword: TSN

# TIME TO CRASH



ROBERT SEALE / TSN

When you think of offensive rebounding, several names come to mind. Dennis Rodman, Jayson Williams and Charles Barkley, for example. But Jerome Williams and Felton Spencer? Those two won't be found among the overall rebounding leaders, but this season they are devoting their limited floor time to hitting the offensive boards and creating second chances for the Pistons and Warriors, respectively. Here is a list of offensive rebounders who are making the most of their minutes:

## Leaders in off. rebounds per 48 minutes\*

Player	Team	Total Off. Reb.	Total Min.	Avg./48
Jayson Williams	Nets	164	847	9.3
Zydrunas Ilgauskas	Cavs	91	619	7.1
Jerome Williams	Pistons	40	273	7.0
Charles Barkley	Rockets	91	637	6.9
Popeye Jones**	Raptors	50	352	6.8
Chris Dudley	Knicks	52	368	6.8
Dennis Rodman	Bulls	110	784	6.7
Jamie Feick	Bucks	22	159	6.6
Michael Stewart	Kings	65	489	6.4
Felton Spencer	Warriors	44	344	6.1

\*Players must average a minimum of six minutes per game.

\*\*On the injured list—out for season

**TIME AFTER TIME:** Barkley is still one of the best in the league at giving his team a fresh 24.

## SCORING AVERAGE

NAME	G	FG	FT	PTS	AVG
JORDAN, Chi	25	246	168	667	26.7
MALONE, Uta	24	230	161	621	25.9
ROBINSON, SA	25	200	182	582	23.3
RICHMOND, Sac	26	204	141	587	22.6
RICE, Cha	24	190	126	538	22.4
ABDUR-RAHIM, Van	26	201	169	571	22.0
WALKER, Bos	23	194	81	496	21.6
ROBINSON, Mil	25	215	80	520	20.8
WEBBER, Was	24	214	52	499	20.8
EWING, NY	26	203	134	540	20.8
IVERSON, Phi	22	171	85	452	20.5
MILLER, Ind	25	161	147	510	20.4
GUGLIOTTA, Min	24	181	122	485	20.2
BAKER, Sea	26	212	96	520	20.0
HILL, Det	26	179	151	510	19.6
SMITH, Atl	23	158	104	450	19.6
HOWARD, Was	25	186	115	487	19.5
FINLEY, Dal	25	179	94	480	19.2
HARDWAY, Mia	25	178	76	474	19.0
B.WILLIAMS, Det	27	221	69	511	18.9
CASSELL, NJ	24	150	146	453	18.9
PAYTON, Sea	26	170	117	482	18.5
ALLEN, Mil	25	161	101	463	18.5
GARNETT, Min	24	181	80	444	18.5
DREXLER, Hou	22	139	102	405	18.4
JONES, LAL	26	167	86	471	18.1
KEMP, Cle	23	160	94	416	18.1
MARBURY, Min	24	148	116	431	18.0
BRYANT, LAL	23	139	109	413	18.0
WILLIS, Hou	22	156	79	391	17.8

## FIELD-GOAL PERCENTAGE

NAME	FG	AT FG%
DUNCAN, SA	180	320 .563
WILLIS, Hou	156	283 .551
DIVAC, Cha	119	218 .546
BAKER, Sea	212	391 .542
MANNING, Phi	145	269 .539
MCDYESS, Phi	124	234 .530
LAETTNER, Atl	146	278 .525
MUTOMBO, Atl	148	283 .523
MALONE, Uta	230	441 .522
REEVES, Van	138	266 .519
ROBINSON, SA	200	387 .517
MULLIN, Ind	124	241 .515
B.WILLIAMS, Det	221	431 .513
SMITS, Ind	189	371 .509

## 3-POINT PERCENTAGE

NAME	3FG	AT 3G%
MILLER, Ind	41	87 .471
HORNACEK, Uta	20	43 .465
KUKOC, Chi	32	69 .464
NASH, Pho	28	61 .459
RICE, Cha	32	72 .444
DAVIS, Dal	30	68 .441
WARD, NY	22	50 .440
MARTIN, LAC	39	90 .433
VAN EXEL, LAL	57	134 .425
BARROS, Bos	21	50 .420
HAWKINS, Sea	43	103 .417
EISLEY, Uta	17	41 .415
LENARD, Mia	46	111 .414
ROGERS, LAC	21	51 .412
DAVIS, Hou	14	34 .412

## FREE-THROW PERCENTAGE

NAME	FT	AT FT%
MULLIN, Ind	46	48 .958
HORNACEK, Uta	105	115 .913
ALLEN, Mil	101	111 .910
MILLER, Ind	147	164 .896
PRICE, Ori	41	46 .891
LENARD, Mia	39	44 .886
LAETTNER, Atl	116	131 .885
RICHMOND, Sac	141	160 .881
MURRAY, Was	51	58 .879
SMITH, Atl	104	119 .874
ANDERSON, Cle	95	109 .872
JOHNSON, Pho	64	74 .865
STITH, Den	44	51 .863
HAWKINS, Sea	56	65 .862
RICE, Cha	126	147 .857
EISLEY, Uta	47	55 .855
CHRISTIE, Tor	62	73 .849
ELLIS, Sea	45	53 .849
VAN EXEL, LAL	73	86 .849
BARRY, LAC	56	66 .849
REEVES, Dal	55	65 .846

## REBOUNDING AVERAGE

NAME	O-D	AVG
J.WILLIAMS, NJ	174-164	14.1
RODMAN, Chi	116-236	14.1
BARKLEY, Hou	95-167	13.8
ROBINSON, SA	94-190	11.4
MUTOMBO, Atl	93-202	11.3
DUNCAN, SA	66-213	11.2
MALONE, Uta	67-181	10.3
HILL, Mil	76-149	10.2
EWING, NY	59-206	10.2
SABONIS, Por	46-188	10.2
GARRETT, Den	90-154	10.2
WALKER, Bos	77-156	10.1
B.WILLIAMS, Det	85-185	10.0
MARSHALL, GS	78-136	9.7
WEBBER, Was	65-168	9.7
D.DAVIS, Ind	92-149	9.6
MASON, Cha	50-181	9.6
GRANT, Por	80-120	9.5
KEMP, Cle	61-150	9.2
GARNETT, Min	56-162	9.1
GUGLIOTTA, Min	62-153	9.0

## ASSISTS

NAME	G	A	AVG
STRICKLAND, Was	27	287	10.6
PAYTON, Sea	26	244	9.4
HARDWAY, Mia	25	231	9.2
KIDD, Pho	23	205	8.9
MARBURY, Min	24	210	8.8
JACKSON, Ind	25	217	8.7
STOUDAMIRE, Tor	26	218	8.4
JOHNSON, SA	25	205	8.2
KNIGHT, Cle	22	179	8.1
CASSELL, NJ	24	190	7.9
HILL, Det	26	195	7.5
VAN EXEL, LAL	26	182	7.0
WESLEY, Cha	23	159	6.9
BRANDON, Mil	21	143	6.8
BLAYLOCK, Atl	25	163	6.5

## STEALS

NAME	G	S	AVG
KNIGHT, Cle	22	69	3.1
KIDD, Pho	23	59	2.6
IVERSON, Phi	22	53	2.4
PAYTON, Sea	26	62	2.4
BRANDON, Mil	21	50	2.4
HARDWAY, Mia	25	57	2.3
PERSON, Cle	24	54	2.3
WALKER, Bos	23	51	2.2
JONES, LAL	26	56	2.2
CHRISTIE, Tor	23	49	2.1
BLAYLOCK, Atl	25	53	2.1
GILL, NJ	24	49	2.0
HUNTER, Det	27	54	2.0
HAWKINS, Sea	26	51	2.0

## BLOCKED SHOTS

NAME	G	BL	AVG
BRADLEY, Dal	14	54	3.9
MUTOMBO, Atl	26	94	3.6
CAMBY, Tor	19	65	3.4
OLAJUWON, Hou	11	31	2.8
DUNCAN, SA	25	63	2.5
STEWART, Sac	26	65	2.5
ROBINSON, SA	25	61	2.4
RATLIFF, Phi	26	63	2.4
EWING, NY	26	58	2.2
JOHNSON, Mil	24	52	2.2
GARNETT, Min	24	50	2.1
OSTERTAG, Uta	22	43	2.0

## TEAM OFFENSE

TEAM	G	FGM-FGA	PCT	3M-3A	PCT	FTM-FTA	PCT	AVG
LA LAKERS	26	1002-2091	.479	171-487	.351	577-817	.706	105.8
HOUSTON	22	802-1779	.451	158-471	.335	492-637	.772	102.5
SEATTLE	26	965-2069	.466	163-441	.370	532-714	.745	101.0
PHOENIX	23	889-1915	.464	117-350	.334	427-577	.740	101.0
MINNESOTA	24	910-1966	.463	66-213	.310	519-694	.748	100.2
NEW JERSEY	24	867-2014	.430	76-224	.339	537-757	.709	97.8
MIAMI	25	902-1968	.458	161-449	.359	477-646	.738	97.7
CHARLOTTE	24	876-1860	.471	96-254	.378	488-667	.732	97.3
PORTLAND	23	816-1798	.454	113-321	.352	472-656	.720	96.4
WASHINGTON	27	1010-2285	.442	106-292	.363	471-673	.700	96.2
INDIANA	25	879-1868	.471	88-240	.367	545-708	.770	95.6
UTAH	24	822-1797	.457	62-191	.325	586-781	.750	95.5
BOSTON	23	823-1928	.427	130-388	.335	413-585	.706	95.2
LA CLIPPERS	26	930-2121	.438	164-452	.363	441-630	.700	94.8
SACRAMENTO	26	952-2142	.444	77-213	.362	459-681	.674	93.8
VANCOUVER	26	923-2052	.450	79-238	.332	505-708	.713	93.5
SAN ANTONIO	25	900-1908	.472	81-242	.335	455-679	.670	93.4
MILWAUKEE	25	885-1882	.470	69-187	.369	493-653	.755	93.3
ATLANTA	26	906-2006	.452	86-288	.299	514-673	.764	92.8
NEW YORK	26	907-2025	.448	100-327	.306	492-656	.750	92.5
CHICAGO	25	900-2058	.437	64-213	.300	448-646	.693	92.5
TORONTO	26	936-2153	.435	83-252	.329	448-624	.718	92.4
PHILADELPHIA	24	828-1847	.448	72-234	.308	486-677	.718	92.3
ORLANDO	26	903-2078	.435	81-249	.325	507-687	.738	92.1
CLEVELAND	24	818-1833	.446	80-250	.320	476-650	.732	91.3
DETROIT	27	917-2106	.435	64-232	.276	562-752	.747	91.1
DENVER	24	793-1899	.418	67-233	.288	516-690	.748	90.4
GOLDEN STATE	23	826-2034	.406	48-195	.246	365-526	.694	89.8
DALLAS	25	853-2030	.420	146-401	.364	369-502	.735	88.8

## TEAM DEFENSE

TEAM	G	FGM-FGA	PCT	3M-3A	PCT	FTM-FTA	PCT	AVG
CHICAGO	25	832-2039	.408	80-278	.288	417-588	.709	86.4
NEW YORK	26	800-1979	.404	91-305	.298	564-744	.758	86.7
CLEVELAND	24	769-1810	.425	86-265	.325	467-637	.733	87.1
DETROIT	27	890-2066	.431	111-343	.324	511-705	.725	89.0
INDIANA	25	859-2016	.426	68-235	.289	443-621	.713	89.2
ATLANTA	26	926-2107	.439	89-312	.285	389-529	.735	89.6
MILWAUKEE	25	839-1863	.450	68-225	.302	546-761	.717	91.7
UTAH	24	787-1858	.424	99-288	.344	532-705	.755	91.9
SAN ANTONIO	25	861-2035	.423	110-320	.344	476-658	.723	92.3
SEATTLE	26	921-2056	.448	114-356	.320	452-645	.701	92.6
PORTLAND	23	780-1838	.424	91-281	.324	491-696	.705	93.1
ORLANDO	26	972-2089	.465	95-274	.347	402-547	.735	93.9
MIAMI	25	869-1965	.442	87-269	.323	527-730	.722	94.1
CHARLOTTE	24	867-1856	.467	98-268	.366	459-629	.730	95.5
NEW JERSEY	24	835-1832	.456	97-283	.343	528-684	.772	95.6
WASHINGTON	27	978-2162	.452	102-276	.370	529-716	.739	95.8
LA LAKERS	26	953-2137	.446	106-334	.317	511-713	.717	97.0
HOUSTON	22	830-1829	.454	109-329	.331	375-519	.723	97.5
DALLAS	25	966-2062	.468	114-317	.360	396-563	.703	97.7
BOSTON	23	800-1701	.470	85-247	.344	567-765	.741	97.9
PHOENIX	23	859-1912	.449	96-283	.339	439-584	.752	98.0
PHILADELPHIA	24	886-1922	.461	108-313	.345	476-662	.719	98.2
SACRAMENTO	26	986-2109	.468	95-273	.348	497-668	.744	98.6
VANCOUVER	26	1014-2156	.470	115-314	.366	474-651	.728	100.7
MINNESOTA	24	898-2010	.447	111-344	.323	509-691	.737	100.7
GOLDEN STATE	23	849-1930	.440	113-289	.391	517-723	.715	101.2
DENVER	24	902-1925	.469	115-304	.378	513-698	.735	101.3
TORONTO	26	1014-2100	.483	120-325	.369	491-727	.675	101.5
LA CLIPPERS	26	998-2148	.465	95-277	.343	574-787	.729	102.5

## Bucks

### Turnovers play big part in five straight losses



Until a victory over the Knicks last Saturday, turnovers had been a big problem. That should subside with the return of **Terrell Brandon**, who was expected to be back on the floor this weekend. Without him, the team has struggled with turnovers, especially from the point guard position. In a 99-90 loss at Charlotte, the team committed 19 turnovers that led to 24 points. It was the team's fourth consecutive defeat and in each loss, turnovers played a big role. **Elliot Perry** had started in Brandon's spot and taken decent care of the ball. But when Perry has been out of the game, **Ray Allen** and **Michael Curry** have been plagued by turnovers while trying to play the point. ... Last Saturday's victory over the Knicks snapped a five-game losing streak, but it started out looking as if the team were headed for a sixth. **Glenn Robinson** lost the ball on the first two possessions and compiled three of the team's five turnovers in the first quarter. But the team didn't have a turnover in the second quarter until **Patrick Ewing**, who was injured in the game, stole the ball from Perry late in the period. —Gregg Hoffmann



## Bulls

### So far, so good for the perennial bad boy



Normally, a player approaching the game with a no-nonsense attitude wouldn't draw much attention. But when the player displaying good behavior is **Dennis Rodman**, it's news. Through last Sunday, Rodman had yet to be ejected from a game and had been assessed only two technical fouls all season—the latest coming last Saturday in a victory over the Nets. Remember, this is the same guy who seemingly had more technicals than points during last season's playoff run. Rodman plans to continue with his Mr. Nice Guy approach because he feels that's what the team needs in the absence of **Scottie Pippen**, who is recovering from foot surgery. ... During the team's holiday party for troubled youth, Pippen told some kids he was returning to the team. But when reporters asked him about his plans, Pippen wasn't so definitive. "I'm trying to let everything fall in place and not be disruptive to the team," he says. "If it happens, good. If not, we'll just have to wait and see." That wait figures to last at least another month. He still is at least three weeks from rejoining the team for practice on a full-time basis. —John Jackson



## Cavaliers

### Kemp fills highlight reel, but play is inconsistent



**Shawn Kemp's** inconsistencies continue to plague the team. Sure, the great dunks are still being shown on SportsCenter, but there clearly are some holes in his game. He gets his 20 points and 10 rebounds most nights on sheer athletic ability. But most observers had expected more. ... Kemp's sidekick, center **Zydrunas Ilgauskas**, is coming into his own. He had a total of 27 rebounds in back-to-back games against Atlanta's **Dikembe Mutombo** and New York's **Patrick Ewing**. Small forward **Cedric Henderson** is a complementary player who goes strong to the basket. ... Rookie point guard **Brevin Knight** has been in foul trouble for the past week. When he is sitting on the bench, the Cavs are a different team. ... Shooting guard **Wesley Person**, whose main function is to shoot, has fallen on hard times. But the team knew it was going to get incredible highs and lows with Person, a streaky shooter. ... Rookie shooting guard **Derek Anderson** has been a pleasant surprise and is providing an incredible spark off the bench. If he can keep playing like he has, he could force coach **Mike Fratello** to put him back into the starting lineup. —Bob Finnan



## Celtics

### Is this team for real? You'll find out



A lot will be learned in the coming weeks about this young team. Starting with last Monday's game against the Hornets, the team will play 23 games before the All-Star break. Of those, 11 are at home, 16 are against winning teams and two more are against teams just below .500 (Minnesota and Washington). If the team continues to play as it has, **Rick Pitino** will be mentioned among Coach of the Year candidates. If it slumps, which would surprise no one, then it will continue to do what it has already done: play hard, make life miserable for opponents and try to have fun. ... Pitino made a shift in the starting backcourt—though, in his system, who starts is not important. Rookie **Ron Mercer** was taken out of the first group and replaced by **Bruce Bowen**, because Pitino wants Mercer to "study" Bowen and learn some defense. **Chauncey Billups** has, for now, regained the point guard job. ... Mercer gives the team offense off the bench, and **Andrew DeClercq** has received more playing time because of the injury to **Travis Knight**. ... It's amazing the team has been able to survive its horrible shooting. Entering the week, the team was 26th in shooting. That won't cut it as the schedule stiffens. —Peter May



## Hawks

### Look out! Everybody's healthy



Coach **Lenny Wilkens** can finally look to his bench for relief. With **Alan Henderson** and **Eldridge Recasner** back after battling injuries, the second unit is beginning to have the kind of impact that makes the team believe it can compete for the championship. Wilkens now has the flexibility to play a big or small lineup to try and dictate tempo or to change the flow of a game. When Recasner became activated during the West Coast trip, the team went to its small lineup for the first time. **Mookie Blaylock** erupted for 26 points on the first night he received significant minutes at shooting guard, as Recasner ran the point and **Steve Smith** moved to the baseline. Recasner, who is playing at about 90 percent, has full command of the halfcourt offense. ... Henderson's return has completely energized the second unit. His presence gives Wilkens an opportunity to play the big lineup against physical teams. When the front line features **Dikembe Mutombo**, **Christian Laettner** and Henderson, it is as imposing as any team in the league. If the team can stay healthy and develop some consistency, it could be even better than it was last month. —Mark F. Gray



## Heat

### Things fall into place with Mourning's return



True to his word, coach **Pat Riley** has taken to playing centers **Isaac Austin** and **Alonzo Mourning** in tandem. During Mourning's first game back, against the Wizards, Riley played Mourning and Austin in tandem for 16 minutes. The biggest loser in the equation is reserve center **Duane Causwell**, who won't get much playing time the rest of the way. ... The concern now is at small forward, where **Jamal Mashburn**, a sure thing for double-digit scoring in the first 20 games, is in a funk with three consecutive single-digit efforts. ... Point guard **Tim Hardaway** went scoreless for the first time in his Heat career in the Washington loss. He was so off the mark that Riley used reserve **Eric Murdock** for the entire fourth quarter. Hardaway rebounded to dominate Philadelphia's **Allen Iverson**. ... Shooting guard **Voshon Lenard** appears to have his stroke back, especially from beyond the 3-point arc. ... With Mourning coming off the bench, the team has its best depth of the season. Among those who figure to lose minutes is forward **Terry Mills**, who had been receiving time at center against small centers. —Ira Winderman



## Hornets

### Rice shows leadership on and off the court



**Glen Rice** is back on a scoring spree, but his biggest contribution to the team's recent success—it is 5-2 over its last seven games through Sunday—may have come off the court, not on it. The All-Star forward erupted in the locker room after a loss November 29 at Atlanta, and the team has performed much better since, including a five-game winning streak earlier this month. Rice's outburst at the time was basically a plea to coach **Dave Cowens** to get the team back to playing the style it played so well last season in winning a franchise-record 54 regular-season games—a style built around **Anthony Mason**, **Vlade Divac** and Rice. It also came one night after Mason had expressed similar concerns following a home loss to Cleveland. Clearly, the team has been changing the offense ever since. Newcomers **David Wesley** and **Bobby Phills** are taking far fewer shots out of the set offense and Rice and Mason more. And the result has shown in the win column. Rice averaged 25 points a game during the five-game winning streak. ... The team plans to re-sign **Donald Royal** shortly after the Christmas holiday. —John DeLong



## Knicks

### Ewing out for season after wrist surgery



The team received the worst possible news, losing **Patrick Ewing** for the season after surgery Sunday on a dislocated wrist. With 24.9 seconds left in the first half of a game at Milwaukee the night before, **Charlie Ward** threw Ewing an alley-oop pass. Ewing was fouled by **Andrew Lang** as he went for the slam, crashed to the court on his right side and lay there holding his wrist for two minutes. After he got up, it became clear how badly Ewing was hurt. He had to shoot both free throws with his left hand, and missed. The team lost the game, but lost much, much more. It must now replace its franchise player, and 11-time All-Star. **Chris Dudley** was expected to fill Ewing's role as starting center. **Buck Williams** also will get time at center. ... One key to the team's resurgence before Ewing's injury was coach **Jeff Van Gundy's** willingness to experiment with the lineup. With Ewing out, look for more of that. At Cleveland Friday, he installed a three-guard rotation of **John Starks**, **Allan Houston** and **Charlie Ward** and the result was a blowout win. Though it won't work against every team, the move tied out the Cavs. —Barbara Barker



## Magic

### Team motto: Have uniform, will play



If you're wearing a Magic uniform, there's a good chance you're going to get a call these days with so many regulars injured. **Penny Hardaway**, **Derek Strong** and **Nick Anderson**, three of the top seven in the rotation, have been out for two weeks. **Mark Price** joined them last Thursday when he missed a game because of an old foot injury. "That leaves us with a pretty shallow bench," says **Brian Evans**, one of a few reserves getting more minutes than he might ordinarily. Evans got an early call to spark the offense against Utah last week and missed his first four shots. CBA signee **Carl Thomas** went in late in the third quarter when Evans couldn't do the job and didn't help, either. Relying on end-of-the-bench talent while in the midst of a three-week schedule that does not include a sub-.500 team until January 7 makes the team one of the league's most vulnerable. "Who are we going to replace (the injured) with? Another CBA guy?" **Gerald Wilkins** says. "You can't expect a guy coming out of the CBA to carry your team for a few weeks until everybody gets healthy." That won't stop coach **Chuck Daly** from looking. "I'm searching for somebody to make shots," he says. —*Bill Fay*



## Pacers

### Bird's boys are flying high after record start



The Pacers are on a roll. A victory over the Magic gave them 15 wins in 18 games and brought them near the end of a busy period in which they played 11 games in 18 days. The team's poor start, during which coach **Larry Bird** questioned its killer instinct, seems like ancient history. "We're playing well, picking teams apart and taking what they give us," point guard **Mark Jackson** says. "It's hard to visualize us 2-5 right now. We're feeling good about ourselves, and it shows." ... The Pacers' 17-8 record at week's end marked the best start in the franchise's NBA history. ... Only three Pacers are scoring in double figures—**Reggie Miller**, **Rik Smits** and **Chris Mullin**. But nine players are averaging at least five points and 15 minutes. Bird goes to the bench often—and he usually gets results. ... The Pacers have an edge on opponents in all statistical categories except turnovers, and they rank second overall in free-throw shooting (76.9 percent). Bird requires every player to hit at least 50 foul shots before leaving any practice. ... The team has hit at least one 3-point basket in 105 consecutive games. —*Mark Montieth*



## Raptors

### Team bags the triangle, goes back to basics



Point guard **Damon Stoudamire** made it clear after a five-point loss to the Celtics last week that it was time for a change. Go back to the simple, basic offense that won the Raptors 30 games last season, he said. Presto. The team abandoned the complicated triangle offense, one which tended not to take advantage of the team's strengths, went back to the basics and won its third game, a one-point victory last Friday against the Bucks. ... The trade of former 76er **Jerry Stackhouse** to Detroit finally kills the rumors of a deal to bring him to Toronto. But no sooner had it been quashed, another Philly-Raptor rumor sprang up: Stoudamire going to the Sixers for **Allen Iverson**. ... Forward **Popeye Jones**, who tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee November 30 against the Lakers, is in Birmingham, Ala., to see orthopedic surgeon **Dr. James Andrews**. Jones, whose absence has left a big hole in the frontcourt and inside the locker room, is weighing his options as he contemplates whether to have knee surgery. Jones, who is eligible for free agency, isn't likely to return to the team this season. —*Craig Daniels*

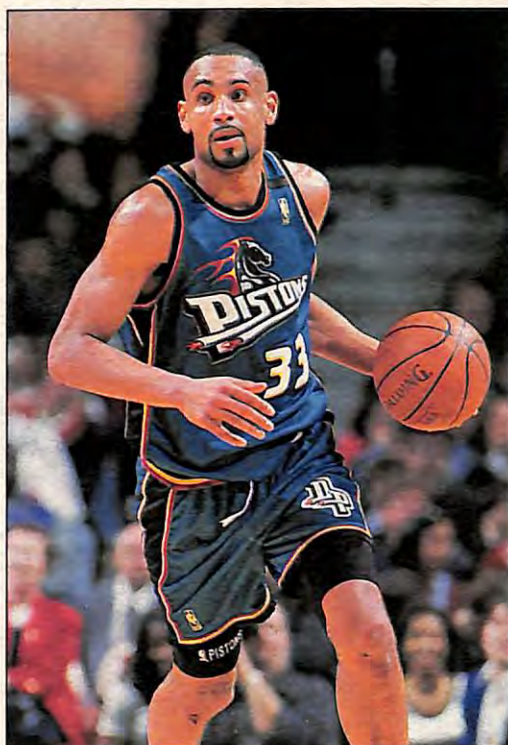


## Nets

### Team is adept at being a bully



About the only thing this team had to look forward to last season was the opportunity to play spoiler against winning teams while beating up the little guys. That scenario seems to be playing out again. The team is 6-0 against teams with a winning percentage under .400. Not only has it beaten the Warriors (twice), the Kings, the Clippers, the 76ers and the Nuggets, it has beaten them badly. All six of the wins have come by 12 or more points, giving coach **John Calipari**'s nerves a break at some opportune times. Unfortunately for Calipari, his team doesn't get another opportunity to face such a team until a visit to Toronto on January 12. ... **Kendall Gill**'s strong play against Detroit last week left him visibly relieved after he had scored 31 points in the three previous games. The key was some advice from the staff about dribbling more toward the hoop and not merely side to side. In that same game, **Keith Van Horn** shot 7-for-18 after an 8-for-11 outing against Denver, leaving in question Van Horn's early consistency. ... **David Benoit** and **Sherman Douglas** have become the key subs with **Chris Gatling** out, and **Michael Cage** knows he'll get a few minutes in **Jayson Williams**' place. —*John Brennan*



DR. DETROIT: Hill, finally, is getting offensive help.

## Pistons

### Stackhouse, Hill could form devastating combo



The acquisition of shooting guard **Jerry Stackhouse** was a bold move for the team's immediate and long-term futures. Stackhouse changes everything. He can work the alleys as well as **Grant Hill** can, and they could become a devastating combination. Stackhouse also should take pressure off **Lindsey Hunter**, who is mired in a shooting slump. Hunter operates better when he is free to go for steals and easy baskets, rather than shooting in the set offense. ... **Joe Dumars**, whom the Pistons had feared might become the kink in their new game plan, says he is willing to come off the bench behind Stackhouse. "That kid needs to start, and I understand that," Dumars says. "I've had 13 years. It's his turn now. I have no problem with it whatsoever." ... The addition of 7-foot center **Eric Montross** allows **Jerome Williams** to shift to power forward, his natural position. But Williams says he could still play center 75 percent of the time. The way he has played so far, it's hard to argue with that. The loss of **Theo Ratliff** affects the Pistons most in one area: shot-blocking. Otherwise, they shouldn't miss him much. —*Steve Addy*



## 76ers

### Stackhouse trade opens backcourt for Jackson



The team said goodbye to another one of those franchise players who always seem to be a can't-miss prospect until he signs with the 76ers. Last week, guard **Jerry Stackhouse**, the No. 3 pick of the '95 draft who was thought to be the anchor of the team's backcourt into the next century, and center **Eric Montross** were traded to the Pistons for guard **Aaron McKie** and center/forward **Theo Ratliff**. The Sixers also gain a conditional No. 1 draft pick that may come at any time over the next eight years at Detroit's discretion. Stackhouse had a reasonably successful rookie season, averaging 19.2 points a game, then seemed to suffer when paired with point guard **Allen Iverson**, the No. 1 pick of the '96 draft. "Allen is basically a two-guard playing the point," Stackhouse says. "He needs the ball, and I need the ball. It doesn't work that way." Stackhouse also is a free agent after this season, and the team would have had to make a huge commitment in money and years to keep him. ... **Tim Thomas** now starts at small forward, **Jim Jackson** moves to off-guard and Ratliff will likely start at center. —*Don Benevento*



## Wizards

### Cheaney emerges during an impressive week



Although physical scars from a fight between **Rod Strickland** and **Tracy Murray** remain on both players, the team has shaken off the three-game losing streak that followed the brawl and won four straight through last Sunday—including seven straight at the new MCI Center. Part of the emergence has been the awakening of shooting guard **Calbert Cheaney**. After sleep-walking through the first six weeks of the season, Cheaney hit 19-of-33 shots and averaged 15.3 points in wins over Charlotte, Miami and Toronto. Although Cheaney did not put up the team's top numbers during its most impressive week of the season, his ability to score doesn't let defenders cheat on Washington's talented front line. ... Last Saturday's win at Toronto marked the start of a five-game road stretch that includes Dallas, Houston and New Jersey between Friday and Monday. ... Not only did the team beat two probable playoff teams last week, but it is showing signs it can play against Eastern Conference teams and their physical style. Against the Western Conference, the Wizards were 8-0. Against the Eastern Conference, the team was 5-14. —*Jerry Bembry*



## Clippers

### Frustration hits the boiling point



The frustration of losing 20 games this early has boiled over into some small, but significant, incidents. Last week, rookie forward **Maurice Taylor** was ejected from the Seattle game for talking trash with **Vin Baker**. Taylor is getting a reputation as a hot-headed player and coach **Bill Fitch** told him to keep his mouth shut. Fitch is trying to keep officials from whistling quick fouls on Taylor in a ploy to calm him down. ... A day after Taylor was ejected, guards **Brent Barry** and **Pooh Richardson**, who are competing for playing time, got into a yelling match during practice. "It was just 4-20," Barry says, explaining the argument. "We're OK. That's in the past." And after **Keith Closs** played only eight minutes in one game, he criticized Fitch and accused the coach of "playing with my head." The two met and discussed the situation, but Closs escaped an expected fine and suspension. Fitch has been impatient with the immaturity of Closs, a rookie who has been late for three practices. ... After scoring 33 points in the opening period of an 82-78 win over Golden State, the team put up these awful numbers over the final three: 49 points; 16-of-56 shooting, including 6-of-23 from the bench; and seven assists. —Gary Washburn



## Jazz

### Carr filling in at center in place of two Gregs



Coach **Jerry Sloan** is disappointed in what he has been getting from **Greg Foster** and **Greg Ostertag** at center, so he inserted **Antoine Carr**, 36, into the lineup as a starter. Carr, who just one week earlier threatened to quit basketball, has responded, and the team beat two Atlantic Division contenders—Miami and Orlando—on the road in his first two starts. Carr, who hadn't started in two-plus years with the Jazz until last week, has a nice touch and is a threat to score, but he has been getting into early foul trouble. ... **Karl Malone** claims he doesn't have "a good feel for the basketball right now," but he has averaged 28.3 ppg in the first three games of a five-game trip. Through Saturday, he had led the team in scoring in every game except the opener. ... **John Stockton** continues his steady recovery. He has been cleared to play 28 minutes—in four, seven-minute stretches—as he comes back slowly from the first major injury of his career. ... **Bryon Russell** still hasn't found his shooting touch, but he is doing the other things, like playing defense and rebounding, that made him a valuable contributor last season. —Loren Jorgensen



## Lakers

### Blount, Campbell sustain frontcourt without Shaq



Just as **Rick Fox** started to supply a much-needed infusion of scoring among the forwards, he fell back again, totalling 21 points in three games before scoring 17 against Charlotte last Saturday. The team hardly needs him as a primary option in the offense—he makes significant contributions elsewhere—but any points are helpful as **Robert Horry** continues to struggle. **Elden Campbell** is doing his part. He averaged 17 points in his first 16 games in place of **Shaquille O'Neal**. ... The guy who has posted one of the best boards-per-minute averages among any reserve in the league is also shooting 63 percent from the field. **Corie Blount** would be leading the NBA in that category if he had the attempts to qualify. But even the limited shots, about four a game, cannot hide that the backup power forward has quietly become a minor offensive weapon to help the frontcourt without O'Neal. In an 11-game run, he averaged 5.5 rebounds and 6.5 points while shooting 57.4 percent. Some of that comes from put-back rebounds, but some comes from a medium-range jumper that deserves respect. —Scott Howard-Cooper



## Grizzlies

### Thorpe's absence slows assist game



The absence of veteran power forward **Otis Thorpe**, who was nursing a strained left knee, affected the team's rebounding and, oddly enough, its halfcourt game. Entering the week, Thorpe was averaging a career-high 3.5 assists and 8.3 rebounds per game. His role in the team's passing game had been giving **Bryant Reeves** and **Shareef Abdur-Rahim** the space they needed to get open shots. Without Thorpe, the Grizzlies did not record an assist in the fourth quarter of a loss to the Spurs last week. ... Reeves, who went through an adjustment period with his new role in coach **Brian Hill**'s offense, is starting to put up the kind of numbers he did last season. Over a recent three-game stretch, Reeves averaged 19.7 points and 7.7 rebounds. Reeves is not getting the kind of deep post-up situations he was last season, when he was constantly forced to fight through double-teams. This season, Hill made it clear from the outset that the key was to try to get Reeves the ball off post passes from either Abdur-Rahim or Thorpe. That way, Reeves could face up and shoot the 10-to-15 foot jumpers or turnaround baseline jumpers, which are his specialties. —Howard Tsumura



OFF THE TIFF: Barry pooh-poohed his practice spat.

## Mavericks

### Heavy minutes starting to weigh down Finley



Although it's true that on many nights, **Michael Finley** is the team's only legitimate scoring threat, coach and G.M. **Don Nelson** needs to lighten up on Finley's workload. Last week against the Warriors, Finley played all but one minute. Then, the next night he played all 48 minutes. There already are signs that Finley is wearing down. In the game against the Warriors, he scored 26 points but needed to take 30 shots to do it. The team is paying Finley a big contract, but it makes no sense to ruin the guy when the team is so bad, leaving him with little left if and when things start to get better. ... With **Dennis Scott** still struggling with his shot, **A.C. Green** slowed by back problems and center **Shawn Bradley** out until January 1 with a calf injury, the team has been relying on second-year forward **Samaki Walker** at center. Walker has responded well, but rebounding will suffer while Bradley is out. ... Says Nelson: "We know we're going to lose a lot of games. That's not what this year is about. This is about making decisions, finding out who can play and changing our style of play." Sound familiar? —Ken Sins



## Kings

### Stewart knocks Polynice from starting lineup



Coach **Eddie Jordan** made the decision to replace center **Olden Polynice** with rookie free agent **Michael Stewart**, ending Polynice's streak of 131 consecutive starts. Polynice, a 10-year veteran, brings experience and can put up 10 points and 10 rebounds in a game on occasion. But he often fails to make an impact in the fourth quarter. As a result, the team opted for the enthusiasm, hustle and shot-blocking abilities of Stewart. Polynice said the decision was unfair because he wasn't being outplayed by "Hakeem Olajuwon or anything like that." He chose to air his gripes in the local media rather than confront Jordan about the decision. ... How long will rookie **Anthony Johnson** continue to start at point guard? **Terry Dehere** and **Bobby Hurley** are both playing perhaps the best ball of their careers, and Johnson entered the weekend shooting less than 30 percent from the field. Johnson is the best of the three defensively, but the team needs scoring, too. ... No. 1 draft pick **Tariq Abdul-Wahad** has yet to make an impact. Entering the weekend, Abdul-Wahad, a swingman, hadn't played in three games because of Jordan's decision. —James Raia



## Nuggets

### Coming off the bench not a problem for Ellis



It's not often the co-captain of an NBA team offers to return to the bench. But small forward **LaPhonso Ellis** did just that last week. To spark a lagging offense, coach **Bill Hanzlik** said he was considering changing the starting lineup, particularly across the front line, where **Ellis** and **Tony Battie** are struggling from the field. Upon hearing this, Ellis admitted he was suffering through a terrible shooting slump and was willing to come off the bench if it would help. "I'm open and always anticipating surprises around here, and this is no different," he says. "I wasn't too keen about going back in the starting lineup anyway. It's been well documented I've been playing too many minutes. The question is, who do you put there and would they do the job?" Ellis had surgery for a torn Achilles' tendon in the offseason and has been battling since to regain his conditioning. Without **Eric Williams** (lost for the year with a torn ACL) and **Bryant Stith** (out following a bone spur), three rookies are starting, and until Ellis returns to form, there is no one capable of carrying the team. —Curtis Eichelberger



## Rockets

### The team is paying the price at guard



The Rockets have made countless personnel moves that have turned out to be right on the money. And then there's the **Brent Price** situation. He is in the second season of a seven-year, \$18 million contract, and his production in Houston has been cut short by injuries. As a result, now that he's healthy, Price has been relegated to No. 3 status among the point guards. "Obviously, they feel comfortable going with **Matt (Maloney)** and **Emanuel (Davis)**," Price says. "Right now, I'm the odd man out, and obviously that's frustrating. I feel like I should be on the court. ... But we'll just have to play it out." ... **Charles Barkley** has his sights set on the NBA's rebounding title this season—or at least staying in contention for it. So far, he has been able to keep pace with Chicago's **Dennis Rodman** and New Jersey's **Jayson Williams**. "It wouldn't be that important (to lead the league), because I've already done it before," Barkley says. "But I want to be right there all year. Anybody can score. Rebounding and stuff like that is when you can tell (who the good players are). If you can help your team more than scoring, that's when you know you're a really good player." —*Eddie Sefko*



## Suns

### Without KJ, there just isn't much offense



Late last season, the team found itself a nice little niche called "Small Ball." The system created headaches for the opposition with wide-open, high-octane lineups that used three and sometimes four guards. But this season, it hasn't worked. And after a 103-90 loss at Cleveland last week, coach **Danny Ainge** conceded that, with guard **Kevin Johnson** out until late January after knee surgery, small lineups might not be the answer. So say goodbye to "Small Ball" and hello to "Crawl Ball." Two nights later, the team went to a more deliberate offense and pounded the ball inside to **Clifford Robinson**, who at 6-10 moved into the starting lineup at small forward, and to power forward **Antonio McDyess**. The team used the new approach to beat the Mavericks, but still shot only 40 percent. Without KJ, this team is having a difficult time generating offense. It's averaging three more turnovers a game than last season and shooting only 33 percent from the longer 3-point distance while taking far fewer attempts from behind the line. ... **Cedric Ceballos** disappeared to the end of the bench again when Ainge opted for Robinson at small forward. —*Bob Young*



## Timberwolves

### Trade involving Parks, Carr falls through



When Philadelphia acquired **Theo Ratliff** from Detroit in the deal involving **Jerry Stackhouse**, **Eric Montross** and **Aaron McKie**, at least one Wolves trade rumor unraveled. Allegedly, the team had been talking to San Antonio about shipping **Chris Carr** and **Cherokee Parks** to the Spurs. The Spurs would have sent **Will Perdue** to Detroit and the Pistons would have paid off the Wolves with Ratliff and **Malik Sealy**. ... The most reliable Wolves bench players—**Sam Mitchell**, **Terry Porter**, **Tom Hammonds** and **Doug West**—are approaching the ends of their careers. The team needs a better blend—more savvy play from the first five and more explosiveness from the backups. ... The Clippers' recent visit to Minnesota served up a showdown at center between **Stanley Roberts** and **Stojko Vrankovic**, the two big men who were traded for each other on draft night. The impact of the trade has been minimal. Roberts entered the weekend averaging 16.2 minutes, 4.3 points, 4.3 rebounds and 0.96 blocked shots. Vrankovic had 18.2 minutes, 4.1 points, 4.1 rebounds and 1.04 blocked shots. —*Steve Aschburner*



## Spurs

### Johnson provides big assist in surge



The Spurs entered the week on the crest of a five-game winning streak that was tied to improved offense. Twice in the streak point guard **Avery Johnson** posted career-high totals of 20 assists. He averaged 13 over the five games and scored a season-high 21 points in a victory over the Rockets. "What that means is that we are making shots," Johnson says. "You can't get an assist without scoring." Included in the winning streak were team field goal-shooting performances of 62.8 percent against Orlando, 52.8 against Denver, 47.9 against the Clippers and 47.6 against Vancouver. Conversely, not one of those opponents shot better than 40 percent from the floor. ... Johnson's game is affected positively when the Spurs run, which they did during their streak. Coach **Gregg Popovich**'s motion offense has been scratched and the team now runs off defensive stops. Still, the team could use some perimeter help with **Vinny Del Negro** battling an elbow injury. ... Spurs fans should pay attention in early January. If an arbitrator permits former Warriors guard **Latrell Sprewell** to return, the team will be aggressive in trying to bring him aboard. Sad but true. —*Kevin O'Keefe*



NEW HEIGHTS: Wallace fitting in at small forward.

## Trail Blazers

### O'Neal-Dunleavy tiff needs a quick resolution



Something will come to a head soon in the Dunleavy/O'Neal saga. Second-year forward **Jermaine O'Neal** seems to have rented space in coach **Mike Dunleavy**'s doghouse. O'Neal was pulled after just three minutes into the second quarter of a game last week, Dunleavy saying something to him about dogging it downcourt. "Is that why you took me out?" asked O'Neal, clearly peeved. The Blazers are fortunate to have hired **George Glymph**, O'Neal's high school coach, as a personnel assistant last summer. Glymph presumably can help smooth over ruffles. But something is not right. O'Neal, 19, is still growing as a player, but he should be making a bigger contribution. ... **Rasheed Wallace** isn't shooting, scoring or rebounding a lot, but he has improved his overall game from early season. Wallace went through a stretch last week where he made 29-of-47 shots from the field, including hitting 6-of-9 against Vancouver. ... **Gary Trent** continues to provide scoring, but with **Kenny Anderson** and **Kelvin Cato** injured, the team's reserve tank is pretty low. ... Take note: Dunleavy sarcastically says he can't make layups or free throws for his players. —*Kerry Eggers*



## SuperSonics

### Everything is coming up roses without Kemp



It's early, but it's worth breaking down what makes the team with the best record two months into the regular season tick: 1) Turnovers. When a team turns the ball over a league-low 13 times a game, it means only one thing: Every possession counts. This statistic reflects how efficient the offense is because the team takes care of the ball. 2) No **Shawn Kemp**. Players are beginning to admit how refreshing and fun it is to play without the distractions—missed planes and buses, negative media attention, constant off-court problems—provided by Kemp. 3) The Tandem. **Vin Baker** and **Gary Payton** provide tons of reasons for the team's success. Let us count the ways: Payton is averaging career highs in assists and rebounds while making only 2.9 turnovers per game, even though he has a larger ballhandling role. Baker leads the team in scoring, rebounding and field-goal percentage. ... **Hersey Hawkins** had been missing in action but is starting to assert himself. He is providing scoring punch early and midway through games, and that seems to consistently jump-start the team when the offense stalls. —*Ronald Tillery*



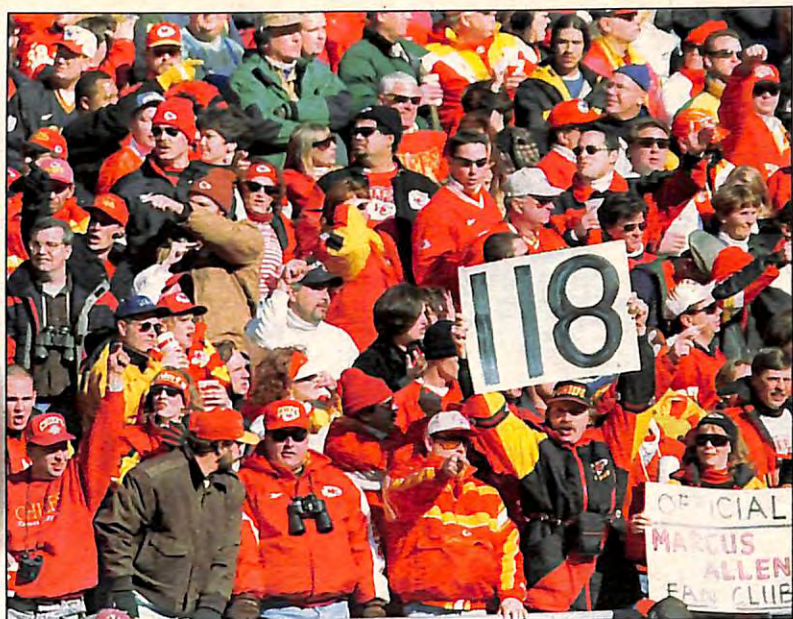
## Warriors

### The defense is solid, the offense is pathetic



Until a 108-89 loss to the Sonics last Saturday, the team had held eight consecutive opponents to fewer than 100 points—all eight coming after **Latrell Sprewell** was suspended for attacking coach **P.J. Carlesimo** December 1. The trouble is, the team had lost four of those games, including an 82-78 loss to the Clippers last week. That game was revealing in that the Clippers scored 33 of those points in the first quarter and only 49 in the final three. But the fact the Warriors lost to a team like the Clippers in such a low-scoring game illustrates the ongoing problem of finding someone to replace Sprewell's 21.4 points a game. **Donyell Marshall** was lost in that game with a back sprain, making the offensive hole even bigger. ... **Joe Smith** is the acknowledged go-to guy down the stretch, and he has delivered most nights and seems comfortable there. ... **Erick Dampier** has been forced to become a major option on offense, and he has responded to the increased attention by becoming a scoring threat (12.7 a game since Sprewell's departure, up from 8.8 before). —*David Steele*





**ADVANTAGE, KANSAS CITY:** For Allen (right) and the Chiefs, there's no place like home. Opponents won't find a noisier stadium than Arrowhead.

# THE RED SEA

**Bolstered by deafening crowd support and a fiery defense, the Chiefs won't sink in the AFC playoffs this time**

**By Paul Attner**

**I TOLD** one of my colleagues at THE SPORTING NEWS I was picking the Chiefs to represent the AFC in the Super Bowl. He never looked up from his computer. Instead, he said one word. "Indianapolis."

I thought no one, other than maybe suffering Chiefs fans, would remember. I was wrong: Colts 10, Chiefs 7, AFC semifinals, Arrowhead Stadium, January 7, 1996.

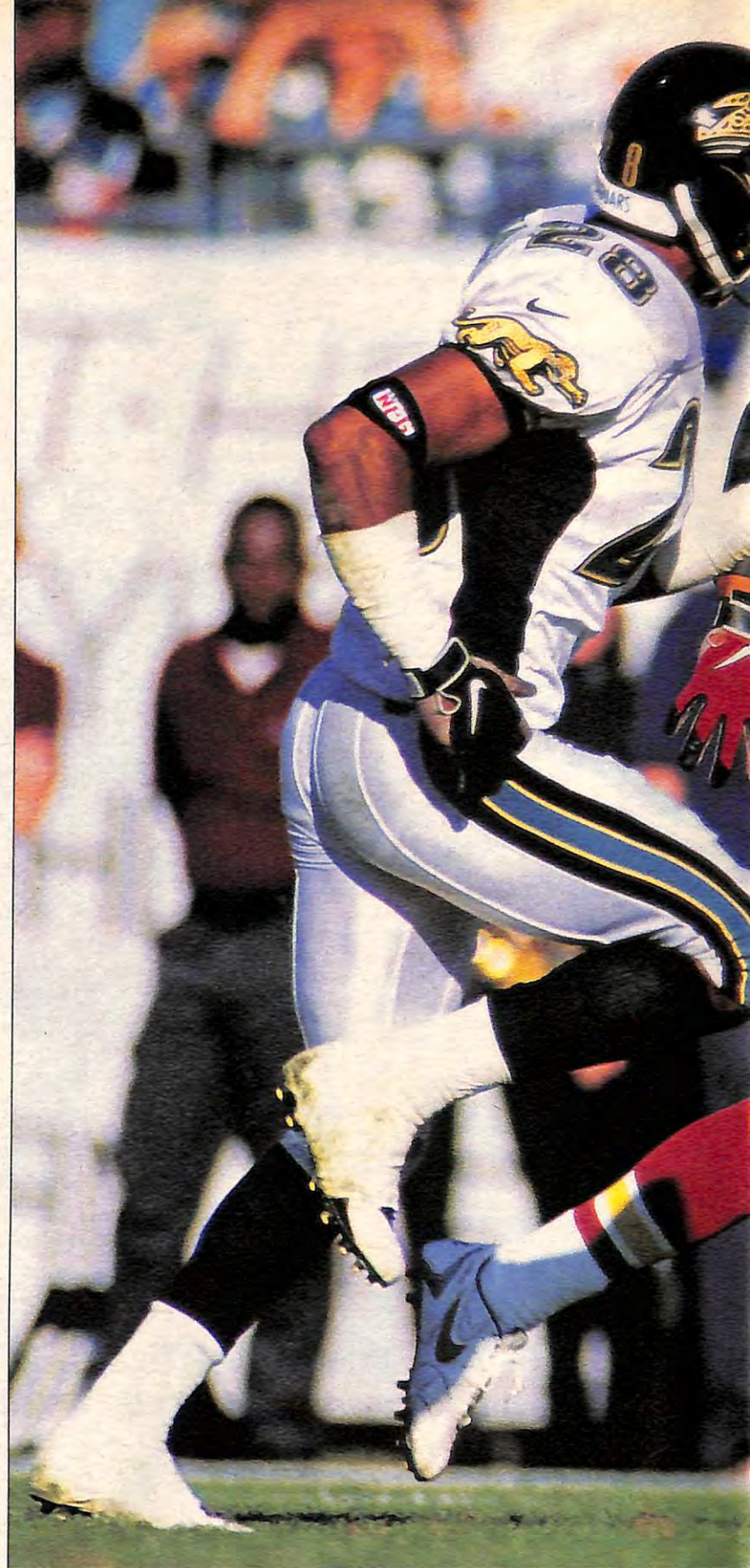
Those Chiefs had a 13-3 record.

These Chiefs: 13-3. Those Chiefs relished playing in front of those 77,000-plus maniacs who turn Arrowhead Stadium into an acoustical nightmare for visiting teams. These Chiefs also haven't lost at home. Those Chiefs won with defense and special teams; these Chiefs win with defense and special teams. (Astounding fact No. 1 about the 1997 Chiefs: Not one player rushed for 100 yards in a game.) Same coach, too, guy named Schottenheimer, who has gained more notoriety than

he ever wanted from his inability to guide talented teams into the NFL championship game. Those Chiefs, well, they didn't just lose to the Colts; they were abysmal doing it. Quarterback Steve Bono was awful and the play-calling was so conservative I was waiting for a single-wing tailback to enter the game.

But I tell you, this January won't be the same as two years ago. These Chiefs are better than those Chiefs and it is not 1998, when I almost certainly would be choosing the

Steelers. (OK, I will say it now: Pittsburgh will win the AFC in 1998.) But Kordell Stewart is a year away from giving Pittsburgh the consistency at quarterback necessary to triumph in a conference championship game. That is the slim but telling edge Kansas City holds over the Steelers. The Chiefs have the best special teams of any AFC playoff club and their defense is sensational. Schottenheimer, who is making his 11th playoff trip and is 0-for-3 in conference title contests—





ED NESSEN/TSN

will do his part by not turning ultraconservative on offense.

Plus, they have the advantage of playing in Arrowhead, which has emerged as the loudest, toughest home field in the league, even more difficult than Lambeau Field. It will require a superb effort to upset them at home, and I am not convinced that even the incredibly resolute Steelers, the miracle workers of 1997, can overcome the immense hurdle of Arrowhead, where they lost, 13-10, in November.

The 49ers likely would agree. They went into Kansas City on November 30 full of themselves, riding an 11-game winning streak, and they left with a 44-9 defeat and a deer-in-the-headlights look that lingered for days. "It is awesome," 49ers coach Steve Mariucci says of Arrowhead. "It is the loudest outdoor stadium in the league. The fans come to inspire their team and they do a good job of it. On offense, the noise is confining. You can't hear the cadence, you can't go on a hard

count. It limits how much you can use motion and your goofy formations. The linemen can't hear the quarterback, so they move when he moves. This one time, when Steve (Young) raised his foot to start a receiver in motion, one of our linemen jumped offside. The linemen are watching Steve and the ball and Derrick Thomas just runs right by them to the quarterback. We jumped offside four times and two more weren't called."

**S**till, before you think I am taking the easy road in the AFC and going with the team holding home-field advantage and the best regular-season record—do I hear "bandwagon" being muttered under your breath?—let me answer with two words.

"Packers" and "history."

In the NFC, the Packers will beat the No. 1-seeded 49ers in the conference championship game (see sidebar). So I can go against the trend. And history tells us that jumping on the shoulders of the top AFC club lately has been a bad deal. The last three AFC teams with home-field advantage ('94 Steelers, '95 Chiefs, '96 Broncos) have not made it to the Super Bowl. Obviously, there is some courage in my prediction, particularly when selecting the Chiefs. (Yeah, I remember "Indianapolis," too).

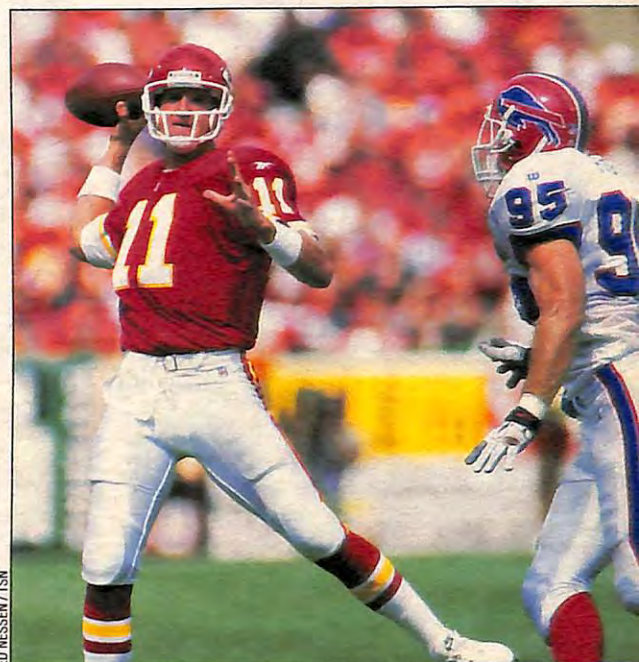
As nifty as the Chiefs are, they are not great, which means the AFC once again has failed to produce a bona fide Super Bowl threat. (Denver once was good enough this season, but not anymore.) In conversations with league personnel experts, the talk immediately centers on the Kansas City defense, which has developed into an overpowering, impressively active unit. (Astounding fact No. 2 about the Chiefs: They lost Neil Smith to free agency and Derrick Thomas for part of the season with a triceps injury, yet their pass rush is much more dangerous than in 1996.)

The Kansas City offense is an afterthought with these experts, even if it has improved considerably from the dinosaur of 1995. But a unit that does not feature a 1,000-yard rusher, that has seen Lake Dawson, its No. 2 wide receiver, catch only 21 passes and that relies on a 37-year-old running back, the admirable Marcus Allen, to score its tough red-zone points isn't exactly formidable. Yet a trip to the Super

Bowl hinges directly on how well this offense operates in January. The Chiefs need to grab early leads, which then would allow their defense to unleash its pass rush.

"They have a no-risk offense," says Randy Mueller, Seattle's vice president of football operations. "They can always run the ball and it is no different this year. I mean, their offensive formula is what has worked in football for 100 years. If you can play defense, run it and not turn it over, you will win a lot of games." The Chiefs have an impressive plus-14 takeaway/giveaway differential, which means they are taking great care of the ball while turning foes into fumblers and bumbler.

Credit some excellent coaching from Schottenheimer and offensive coordinator Paul Hackett, plus the addition of receiver Andre Rison and the play of quarterbacks Elvis Grbac and Rich Gannon, for the



**A MATTER OF RUST:** After missing six weeks, Grbac represents a question mark for the Chiefs.

Chiefs' offensive improvement. (They actually can get the ball down the field this season.) Rison has resurrected his career, but now it will be intriguing to see how he handles constant double-teaming in the playoffs by quality defenses. Gannon, as well as he has played in relief of the injured Grbac (broken collarbone), is not a strong enough passer to direct a team into the Super Bowl. That means Grbac, a better playmaker, needs to shed his rust (5-of-14, 51 yards last Sunday against New Orleans) and be at peak form by the time Kansas City begins its playoff quest next week.

It will be a pressurized postseason for Grbac, who has never started a playoff game in his five seasons. But he still has more overall experience than Stewart and should be less prone to make errors. That is essential. When Stewart is at his best, he

**Rison has resurrected his career, but now it will be intriguing to see how he handles constant double-teaming in the playoffs by quality defenses.**



**NEW DIMENSION:** Rison combines with Grbac to give the Chiefs a deep threat they didn't have in '95.

is easily more sensational and dangerous than Grbac, but he'll make a lot more mistakes than his Kansas City counterpart (witness his conference-high 17 interceptions).

"Marty has let Hackett open it up more this year and that has been important," says Mark May, the former Redskin Hog turned TV analyst. "There is not quite as much three yards and a cloud of dust, but you can be more confident when you have Rison and Grbac. This is why you play Grbac. Rich knows how not to hurt them when he plays, but Elvis can help them win."

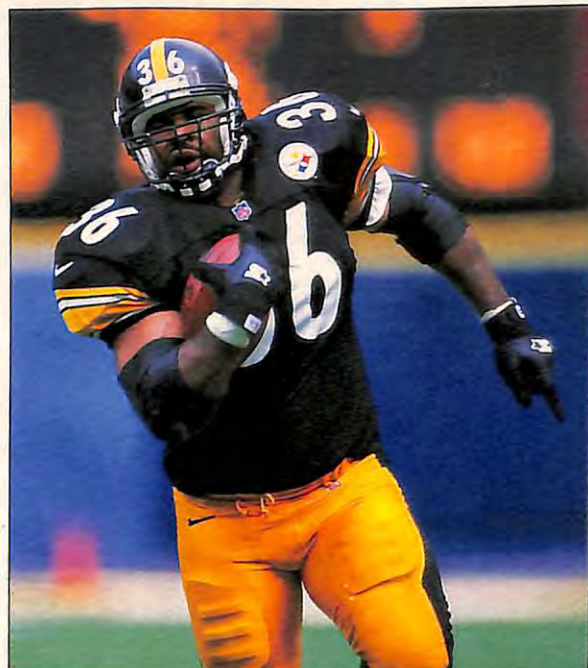
In contrast, the Steelers, who needed overtime to clinch two of their last three victories, are still an offensive work-in-progress. Stewart continues to learn how to best utilize his multiple skills. His determination to show he could be an NFL-level passer has hindered his desire to set off on impromptu runs, but he is scrambling with a purpose better lately. Coach Bill Cowher wants more.

"We need to throw the ball effec-

tively if we want to get where we want to go," he says. "I like the strides that we've taken, but we have to continue to get better. Kordell is growing. He's getting a feel for it. We don't want to harness him; we're trying to get him out of the pocket a little." But Cowher has no such concerns about his defense, which currently is playing at peak form. In the best Steelers tradition, this team will be a nasty foe for any playoff quarterback.

While we are discussing quarterbacks, let's throw more names into the mix. Because of Mark Brunell, Jacksonville enters these playoffs again as the most dangerous underdog. The Jaguars' offense has never gotten into its 1996 sync, but Brunell is nearing the form he displayed last year before hurting a knee four months ago. He is a more polished Stewart and he has two effective receivers and two talented runners. That should be enough to scare, if not upset, the Broncos in Mile High Stadium Saturday. In this rematch from last January, when a victory propelled the Jags into the spotlight, the 1997 Broncos are not nearly as attractive as they were 12 months ago. They need a huge effort from Terrell Davis, who is coming off a shoulder separation, and somehow John Elway must pull himself out of a mini-slump—forget what he did against the inept Chargers last Sunday—that reached shocking proportions in the second half against San Francisco in Week 16. He's not being helped by dropped passes, yet too often lately, he throws like someone whose arm is worn down.

But even if the Broncos prevail in the first round, they must travel the following week and they have been a bad road team, having lost three of their last four away from Mile High.

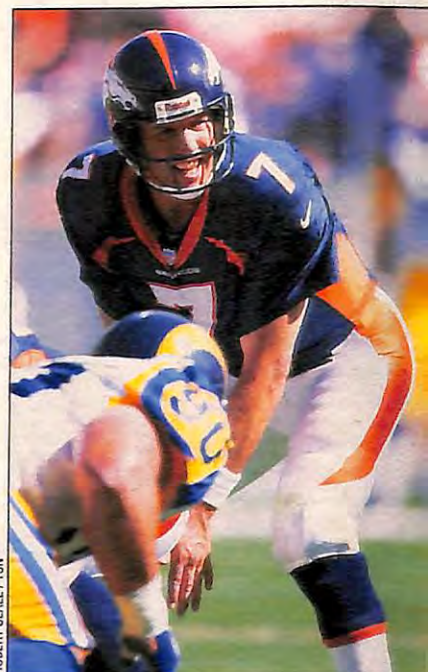


**NOT YET TIME, PAST THEIR PRIME:** Jerome Bettis (left) leads a Steelers team that is a year away from the Super Bowl. Elway (below) and the Broncos, on the other hand, blew a great opportunity last season, and their failure to capture home-field advantage sealed their doom this January. This isn't the Elway of old.

They have the worst run defense of any playoff team in either conference, and when you can't stop the run, you don't win championships.

I have intentionally postponed mentioning the AFC East representatives, the underachieving Patriots and the so-so Dolphins. They deserve to be buried in this story, just as they deserve to be buried early in the playoffs as punishment for their failure to perform with any noteworthy consistency. The East teams will stage an intramural struggle Sunday before the winner receives a well-earned exit in the semifinals.

The Patriots obviously have the talent to last longer, considering it was only a year ago that they began a Super Bowl run. But without Bill Parcells, this is not the same driven club. Nor has Drew Bledsoe developed into the big-game quarterback needed to bail out his teammates



## Two for the show

**Green Bay, San Francisco and why bother?** That is the NFC playoff situation, folks.

The 49ers will have home-field advantage, which is the only reason they could upset the Packers. But if San Francisco beats Green Bay, it will be an upset. The Packers have steamrolled through December with the same kind of balanced offense that appeared at the end of last season en route to a Super Bowl victory. Their defense might not be quite as good as in 1996, but they've been intelligent enough to give Gilbert Brown and his sore ankle time to heal. By the time he plays again next weekend, he should be as healthy as he has been all season. And that should toughen the Packers in the middle, where they have been vulnerable.

San Francisco won't have Jerry Rice, the one player it needed to level the field against the Packers. Without him, the Packers will be able to take away Steve Young's wide receivers. And if Garrison Hearst can't rebound quickly enough from a broken collarbone, Brown and Co. will control the 49ers' running game. That means Young's short passes will have to beat Brett Favre's long gainers. Not going to happen. The Packers simply have molded themselves once again into the NFL's best team.

As for the other NFC playoff participants, at least Barry Sanders will have one more opportunity to thrill us this season, this time at Tampa Bay on Sunday. The Bucs, playing at home, are good enough defensively to keep him from dominating. They also should feast on quarterback Scott Mitchell. Much like Pittsburgh, Tampa Bay just needs more time to make a legitimate Super Bowl run.

On Saturday, the Vikings travel to the Meadowlands, where the splendid Giants defense will force three or four Randall Cunningham interceptions and New York will continue its improbable 1997 ride. For just one more week. But coach Jim Fassel has done such an outstanding job simplifying things that his players clearly understand now what it takes to be successful. The offense doesn't make mistakes. Instead, it waits for the defense to create turnovers, and then the Giants convert those opportunities into enough points to win. It may not be glamorous, but it works.

But all these preliminaries just clutter the picture until the only game that should matter—the Packers at the 49ers on January 11 in San Francisco. It's a matchup the Packers don't fear—but the 49ers should. —Paul Attner

when everything is not functioning smoothly. No wonder some of his teammates yelled at him and each other in the locker room after the loss to the Steelers two weeks ago, when a boneheaded interception in the final minutes eventually allowed Pittsburgh to win.

(By the way, Parcels has only himself to blame for the Jets' elimination from the playoffs. He changed his mind at last winter's NFL meeting and came out against instant replay, ruining any chances of the technology being reinstated for this season. Replay would have reversed that awful interception call in the end zone that went the Lions' way last Sunday and maybe the Jets, not Detroit, would still be playing. Now, of course, he will vote for replay.)

"This year, I would be shocked if the Chiefs don't win (the AFC)," May says. "They have enough talent, you can see that. But they are like San Francisco now. They care about each other, they care as a team and they are not bickering with each other. It's a great tribute to Marty, to get things on the right track after missing the playoffs last season."

Chiefs players, of course, also believe they will not repeat the nightmare of two years ago, and for many of the same reasons articulated by May. "I think the biggest difference (from 1995) is the number of leaders we have at every position," guard Dave Szott says. "I think we have more maturity than in 1995. We're focused and not letting anything take away from the problems at hand."

How's this for a scenario? Fourth quarter in Arrowhead; the AFC title to the winner; the Chiefs, leading by six, three minutes left, the Steelers—a sensational second-half team—with the ball against a defense that hasn't given up a second-half touchdown in 10 of its last 11 regular-season games; Schottenheimer prowling the sidelines, trying not to remember how another scrambler named Elway ruined a Super Bowl dream 11 years ago. Finally for Marty, the long heartbreak will end. Because Stewart is not Elway.

Yet.

TSN

Senior writer Paul Attner covers the NFL for THE SPORTING NEWS.

# HEY, MOM, can I keep him?



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# Insider

Dan Pompei

## Cowboys need tinkering, not an overhaul

**T**he Cowboys had better be enjoying their holiday vacation, because next year at this time they will be too concerned with post patterns to be thinking about mistletoe. Yes, Dallas should

become a dominant team again.

The dynasty is not dead so much as dormant. With a new coach and some relatively minor personnel tinkering, the Cowboys will find themselves closer to the Super Bowl next year than the first pick in the draft.

Many critics contend the only part of the Cowboys that is capable of bouncing back is Nate Newton's gut. It's easy to understand. They really became a pretty bad team this season.

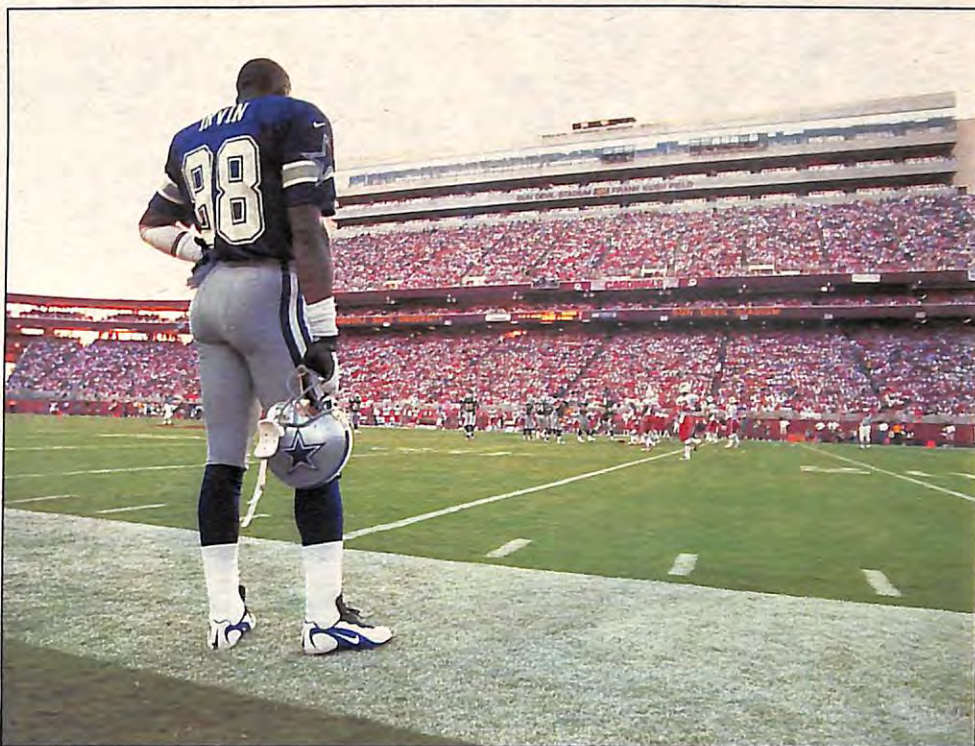
But the nucleus of a great team remains. Redskins G.M. Charley Casserly points out the Cowboys have the most "true Pro Bowl players" of any team in the NFC. The Cowboys have only four actual Pro Bowlers, but they have seven players who consistently perform at a Pro Bowl level: quarterback Troy Aikman, receiver

Michael Irvin, offensive tackle Larry Allen, defensive tackle Leon Lett, strong safety Darren Woodson, free safety Brock Marion and cornerback Deion Sanders. The Packers have six such players: quarterback Brett Favre, receiver Robert Brooks, defensive end Reggie White, defensive tackle Gilbert Brown, strong safety LeRoy Butler and cornerback Doug Evans. The 49ers have six: quarterback Steve Young, receiver Jerry Rice, defensive end Chris Doleman, defensive tackles Bryant Young and Dana Stubblefield and free safety Merton Hanks. The Bucs have five: fullback Mike Alstott, defensive tackle Warren Sapp, linebackers Hardy Nickerson and Derrick Brooks and strong safety John Lynch.

So all the Cowboys have to do from a personnel standpoint is re-sign their free agents—Allen and Marion—and then acquire three new starters—a defensive end and two guards—and a few support players.

The Cowboys got 11 sacks out of their two starting defensive ends. The lack of pressure up front is the main reason they ended up with an NFL-low 19 takeaways. "They miss Charles Haley dramatically," says Bears offensive line coach Tony Wise, a former Cowboys assistant.

Undersized Shante Carver, a free agent to be, plays high and gets driven back. Tony Tolbert's bad knees are catching up with him. He takes a lot of practices off to rest his legs, and it shows.



**IT'S NOT HOPELESS:** The Cowboys had a disappointing season, but standout players such as Irvin ensure that the future can be great if the right changes are made.

One pro personnel director thought the Cowboys' defensive line was one of the worst in the league before Lett returned from his suspension. Offensive coordinators game-planned to run right at decrepit tackle Tony Casillas, and there wasn't much the Cowboys could do about it.

Still, the Cowboys regressed mostly because of problems on their other line. Their only offensive lineman who had a good season was Allen. He will play left tackle if he is re-signed. Right tackle Erik Williams lost flexibility and quickness after an auto accident ravaged his knee in 1994, and he has gone from being dominant to slightly above average. The Cowboys can live with Williams and even with center Clay Shiver, who made many mistakes of inexperience this year and didn't have the power to compensate.

Left guard Newton, on the other hand, should be replaced. He is 36, has bad knees and is absurdly overweight. As a result, Newton isn't fast enough to sweep or pull, and he is slow to adjust to stunts and blitzes. The Cowboys averaged 3.9 yards per run this year, but only 3.3 to the left side. During the fourth quarter of one game, Newton told an opponent, "I haven't blocked the right guy once today."

George Hegamin and John Flannery are free agents, and the Cowboys believe they won't miss them if they sign elsewhere. Venerable tackle Mark

Tuinei no longer can handle speed rushers and probably won't be invited back.

Offensive line inadequacies account for much of what ailed Emmitt Smith. That isn't to say Smith hasn't fallen off. It used to be when he broke into daylight, tacklers could only get to him and bring him down from rear angles. He would always be at the front of the pile after a run. Now, tacklers are getting to Smith from the side and head on, driving him back. That's an indication that his burst through the tackle has faded.

But Smith isn't finished. The Cowboys can win with him if they put better blockers in front of him. Aikman, too, will improve with better blocking. He got to the point where he was leaving the pocket or throwing quicker than he had to because he had lost confidence in his line.

The 1997 season was an aberration for the Cowboys. If management makes the right moves, the future will be so bright they'll have to wear tinted face shields.

## A little intrigue

Why did the Broncos release defensive tackle Michael Dean Perry?

The problems began in the offseason, when Perry, who never has been much of a workout guy, worked out less than usual because of a toe injury. Subsequently, he had no drive in his legs once the season began. Coach Mike Shanahan gave him seven games off to regain his strength. But when Perry was activated against the Steelers in Week 15, he didn't play any different than he had before his time off. So Shanahan made Perry inactive against the 49ers the following week.

Then, Shanahan refused to make any promises for playing time. So Perry asked for his release and it was granted.

Enter the Chiefs, who claimed Perry off waivers and hope for some payback.

If the Chiefs and Broncos meet in the playoffs, the Broncos probably will have to change their line calls. And the Chiefs believe Perry could match up well against Broncos guard Brian Habib, whom Perry knows well from daily practice tussles. The Chiefs also figure it will be a good move if they can just get six good plays a game from Perry as a fourth defensive tackle. It didn't cost the Chiefs much, as they were responsible for only \$82,000 of Perry's \$1.4 million salary.

Perry wants to come back for his 11th season and his contract is up, so he has all kinds of incentive. If the Chiefs hadn't claimed Perry, the 49ers were preparing to pursue him.

TSN

Senior writer Dan Pompei covers the NFL for THE SPORTING NEWS. E-mail him at [pompei@sportingnews.com](mailto:pompei@sportingnews.com).

## Breakdown

■ Two of the three 2,000-yard rushing seasons in NFL history have been clinched against the Jets. **O.J. Simpson** had 200 yards in the final game of the 1973 season to finish with 2,003, and **Barry Sanders** had 184 yards Sunday to finish with 2,053. **Eric Dickerson** hurdled the 2,000-yard mark with a 215-yard game against the Oilers in 1984.

■ The Bills finished the season with a third-down conversion percentage of 25.0, the worst in NFL history for a 16-game season.

■ **Rodney Hampton** scored his first rushing TD of the year to break the team career record of 48.

■ The Cowboys' six rushing touchdowns tied a team-record low set in 1960 and tied a year later.

■ **Warrick Dunn** had a 76-yard run, the longest in Tampa Bay history.

■ The Giants finished with 44 takeaways, one more than their previous team best set in 1986.

■ A quarterback, **Steve McNair**, had the most yards rushing (90) against the Steelers.

■ Dallas is 17-17 since beating Pittsburgh in the 1996 Super Bowl.

■ The Eagles defense allowed more than 30 points six times this season, the most since the 1967 team also allowed six.

■ Cardinals fullback **Larry Centers**, who caught 200 passes and nine TDs the previous two seasons, did not catch his first touchdown pass of 1997 until five seconds remained in the season.



**RECORD RUN:** Dunn's run was a Bucs best.

PAUL BATTAGLIA/AP

## Out on a limb

Fearless TSN predictions

■ The Cardinals will hire Jim Zorn as quarterbacks coach and give him most of the responsibility for the offense, demoting offensive coordinator Dick Jamieson.

■ With Billy Joe Hobert's bubble burst by a season-ending three interceptions, coach Mike Ditka and Saints management will seriously consider making a blockbuster trade for the No. 1 overall pick and the right to select Tennessee QB Peyton Manning.

■ No coach has had more success against Barry Sanders than Tony Dungy, who will devise a strategy to hold Sanders to fewer than 100 yards for the first time since Week 2.

## inside dish

FRONT OFFICE  
RUMBLINGS AND  
LOCKER ROOM  
WHISPERS FROM  
DAN POMPEI

Smart money is on coaching changes to occur in Seattle (**Dennis Erickson** will be sacrificed for a new regime), Oakland (**Al Davis** has to blame someone, so **Joe Bugel** gets the ax), Indianapolis (a classic case of a team that needs to make a change to sell tickets, so **Lindy Infante** goes), Minneapolis (firing **Dennis Green** will suit Green better than it does the Vikings) and Dallas (under **Barry Switzer**, the Cowboys cry out for discipline and structure). Among those who are safe are the Redskins' **Norv Turner**, the Cardinals' **Vince Tobin**, the Bears' **Dave Wannstedt**, the Chargers' **Kevin Gilbride** and the Ravens' **Ted Marchibroda**.

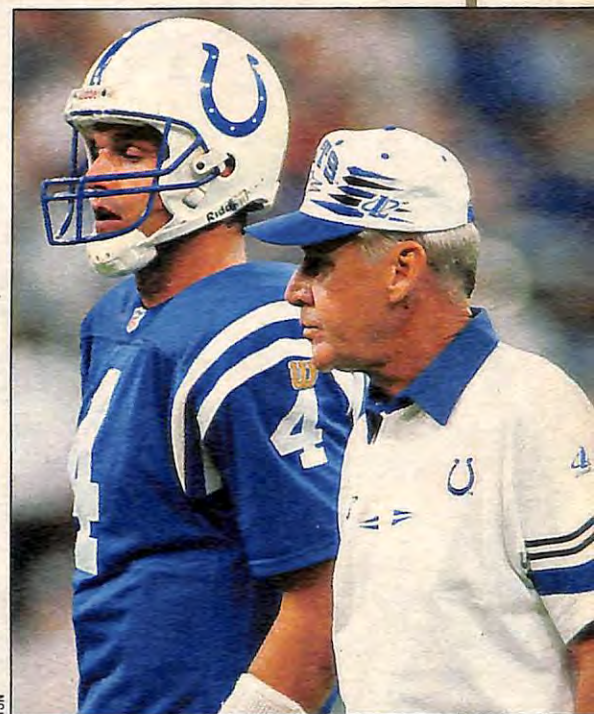
If Infante is fired, he could take over as offensive coordinator in Kansas City. Infante was **Marty Schottenheimer's** offensive coordinator for the Browns in the late '80s before becoming head coach of the Packers.

If Infante stays put, or if he decides he doesn't want to be a coordinator, the leading candidate to replace **Paul Hackett** as the Chiefs' offensive coordinator appears to be Chiefs offensive line coach **Mike Solari**.

A West Coast offense disciple who spent five years as a 49ers assistant, Solari earned Schottenheimer's respect for his work with **Glenn Parker** and **Jeff Criswell** this year. Also receiving consideration for the job is Chiefs running backs coach **Jimmy Raye**.

The Ravens are expected to make a push for Steelers receiver **Yancey Thigpen** in free agency, and if they sign him, they'll allow **Derrick Alexander** to sign elsewhere. Thigpen and **Michael Jackson** would make an outstanding receiving duo, and signing Thigpen would weaken a division rival.

If, as expected, the Bears insist that middle linebacker **Bryan Cox** take a pay cut, Cox says he'll refuse and take his release. Cox says there are only a couple of teams he would play for, and one of them is Green Bay. But the division-rival Packers have seen Cox at his absolute worst and have no interest in signing the volatile linebacker.



**END OF THE ROAD?** Infante (right, with quarterback Jim Harbaugh) likely will be shown the door in Indianapolis.

## TSN's Power Poll

Rk.	Team	W-L-T	Streak	Comment
1.	Green Bay	13-3-0	W5	Peaking at just the right time.
2.	Kansas City	13-3-0	W6	Obviously, Hackett wasn't only one thinking warm thoughts.
3.	San Francisco	13-3-0	L1	No Rice, but home field is nice.
4.	Denver	12-4-0	W1	The Broncos have the Jaguars right where they want them.
5.	Pittsburgh	11-5-0	L1	Cowher put playoffs before records—that's why he's good.
6.	Jacksonville	11-5-0	W2	Will lightning strike twice? Jags certainly hope so.
7.	N.Y. Giants	10-5-1	W3	Routing Cowboys was the perfect end to a dream season.
8.	New England	9-6-0	L1	The Jets took all the heat off.
9.	Tampa Bay	10-6-0	W1	No, really. The Bucs are in the playoffs.
10.	Miami	9-6-0	L1	See New England above.
11.	Detroit	9-7-0	W2	Barry's big day came in Lions' biggest game of the season.
12.	Minnesota	9-7-0	W1	Whew! They stopped the losing streak just in time.
13.	N.Y. Jets	9-7-0	L1	Let's face it: No one expected Jets to even come close.
14.	Washington	8-7-1	W1	The Redskins will always talk about the ones that got away.
15.	Tennessee	8-8-0	W1	Can you catch a football? Call the Oilers.
16.	Cincinnati	7-9-0	W3	Esiason is undisputed king of the Queen City.
17.	Seattle	8-8-0	W2	Erickson's postgame Gatorade bath could be his last.
18.	Atlanta	7-9-0	L1	Last game shows they're still the Falcons after all.
19.	Philadelphia	6-9-1	L3	This is not where Rhodes thought he'd be after three years.
20.	Carolina	7-9-0	L2	Year of the Cat crumbled into kitty litter.
21.	Dallas	6-10-0	L5	They saved their worst for last—and that's saying something.
22.	Baltimore	6-9-1	L1	Unitas is still the best quarterback in Baltimore.
23.	Buffalo	6-10-0	L3	Levy is promising to rebuild—and to do it fast.
24.	New Orleans	6-10-0	L1	Iron Mike's first team played more like Tin Men.
25.	St. Louis	5-11-0	W1	Seven losses by eight points or less.
26.	Arizona	4-12-0	W1	Oh well, they didn't want to draft a quarterback anyway.
27.	Chicago	4-12-0	L1	Worst season since the Abe Giron era. 'Nuff said.
28.	Oakland	4-12-0	L5	Boy, those offseason signings sure paid off.
29.	San Diego	4-12-0	L8	Somewhere, Buddy Ryan is having the last laugh.
30.	Indianapolis	3-13-0	L1	Peyton, you can start house-hunting now.

Through Sunday's games.

TSN's Power Poll is produced by TSN editors and writers.

# MORE FINE POINTS

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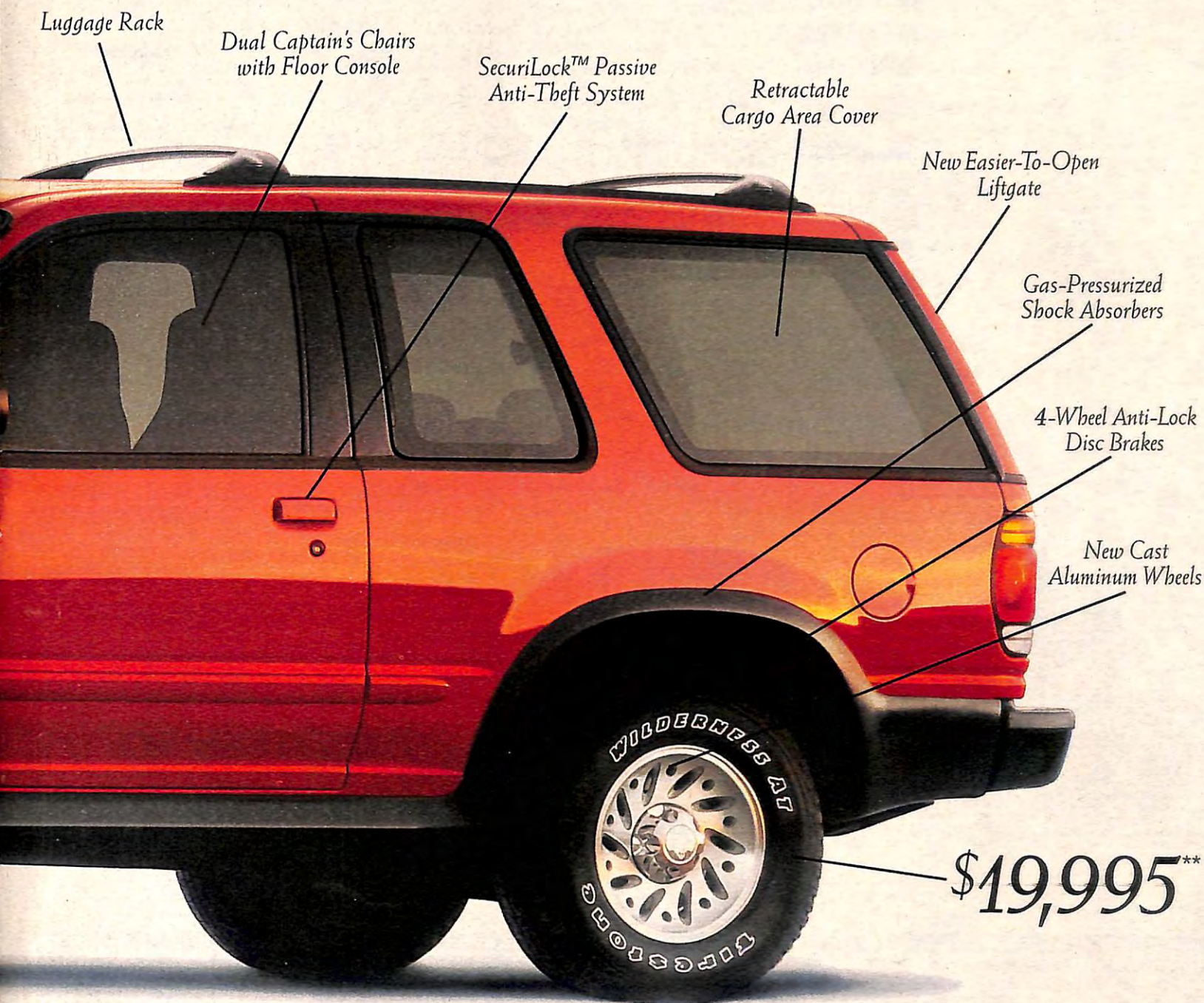
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## SUNDAY'S GAMES

## JAGUARS 20, RAIDERS 9

Jacksonville ... 14 0 0 6 20  
Oakland ... 0 3 6 0 9

First Quarter Jac.—McCardell 35 pass from Brunell (Hollis kick), 6:47. Jac.—Jones 26 pass from Brunell (Hollis kick), 12:17.

Second Quarter Oak.—FG, Ford 33, 9:07.

Third Quarter Oak.—Dudley 2 pass from George (pass failed), 7:54.

Fourth Quarter Jac.—FG, Hollis 19, 2:05. Jac.—FG, Hollis 23, 10:00.

A—40,032

	Jac.	Oak.
First Downs	20	19
Rushes-Yards	31-143	24-108
Passing	274	192
Punt Returns	2-12	0-0
Kickoff Returns	1-22	4-74
Interception Returns	0-0	0-0
Comp-Att-Int	19-28-0	24-37-0
Sacked-Yards Lost	1-9	6-52
Punts	4-37	6-42
Fumbles-Lost	1-0	1-1
Penalties-Yards	3-11	5-40
Time of Possession	28:25	31:35

## INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING—Jacksonville, Means 18-80, Stewart 6-42, Johnson 4 (-minus 6), Brunell 3-27. OAKLAND, Kaufman 21-94, Levitt 2-3, Hall 1-11. PASSING—Jacksonville, Brunell 18-27-0-243, Johnson 1-1-0-40. OAKLAND, George 24-37-0-244. RECEIVING—Jacksonville, McCardell 7-116, Smith 6-93, Stewart 2-23, Jones 1-26, Barlow 1-12, Mitchell 1-8, Means 1-5. OAKLAND, T. Brown 14-164, Jett 3-38, Truitt 3-29, Kaufman 3-11, Dudley 1-2. MISSED FIELD GOAL ATTEMPTS—None. INTERCEPTIONS—None. KICKOFF RETURNS—Jacksonville, Barlow 1-22. OAKLAND, Howard 4-74. PUNT RETURNS—Jacksonville, Barlow 2-12. SACKS—Jacksonville, Davis 1, Tuolo 1, Simmons 1, Hamilton 1, Lageman 1, Wynn 1/2, Smeenge 1/2. OAKLAND, Maryland 1.

## GIANTS 20, COWBOYS 7

N.Y. Giants ..... 10 10 0 0 20  
Dallas ..... 0 0 7 0 7

First Quarter NYG—FG, Daluio 28, 5:16.

NYG—Calloway 21 pass from Kanell (Daluio kick), 14:29.

Second Quarter NYG—FG, Daluio 42, 7:01.

NYG—Hampton 1 run (Daluio kick), 13:41.

Third Quarter Dal.—E. Smith 4 run (Cunningham kick), 1:03.

A—63,746

	NYG	Dal.
First Downs	17	11
Rushes-Yards	44-147	21-79
Passing	136	105
Punt Returns	2-23	6-75
Kickoff Returns	0-0	3-70
Interception Returns	1-0	0-0
Comp-Att-Int	10-25-0	17-32-1
Sacked-Yards Lost	3-7	4-31
Punts	8-40	7-42
Fumbles-Lost	2-1	2-2
Penalties-Yards	4-50	9-88
Time of Possession	35:11	24:49

## INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING—New York, Barber 17-82, Hampton 12-38, Way 7-15, Lane 5-13, Pegram 2 (-minus 1), Brown 1-0. DALLAS, E. Smith 13-40, S. Williams 6-39, Aikman 1-0, Wilson 1-0. PASSING—New York, Kanell 8-16-0-129, Brown 2-9-0-14, Dallas, Aikman 6-16-1-73, Garrett 10-14-0-56, Wilson 1-2-0-7. RECEIVING—New York, Calloway 3-74, Patten 2-47, Toomer 2-14, Way 1-5, Barber 1-2, Pierce 1-1, Dallas, Miller 5-49, LaFleur 3-11, Walker 2-16, St. Williams 2-16, Irvin 2-13, E. Smith 1-15, Galbraith 1-11, S. Williams 1-5. MISSED FIELD GOAL ATTEMPTS—New York,

## BEASTS OF THE EAST

Pct. of Super Bowl wins after division title. Pct. of Super Bowl appearances after division title.



Since the AFL/NFL merger in 1970, the NFC East has been pro football's dominant division. The bar chart (left) ranks each post-merger Super Bowl team and the percentage of its division titles that resulted in a Super Bowl appearance and/or win. The pie charts (right) show the number of the division titles won by each team. The number beneath division names indicates the Super Bowl appearances made by division winners (chart excludes Super Bowl XVII after 1982 season).

Charles Way

NOTE: Data does not include 1982 season or wild cards.  
\*Does not include this season.  
†Became Ravens in 1996.  
PHOTO BY JOHN DUNN FOR TSN; GRAPHIC BY MIKE NYERGES / TSN



Fumbles-Lost 1-1  
Penalties-Yards 3-30  
Time of Possession 31:29 28:31

## INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING—Chicago, Autry 16-45, Mirer 4-6, Ton. Carter 2-25, Hicks 2-9, Harmon 2-6, Kramer 1 (-minus 1). TAMPA BAY, Dunn 16-119, Rhett 6-20, Alstott 5-12, Walsh 3 (-minus 3), Anthony 1-23, Diller 1-7, Ellison 1-5. PASSING—Chicago, Kramer 12-19-1-82, Mirer 6-10-1-39, Tampa Bay, Diller 10-18-0-94, Walsh 1-1-0-0. RECEIVING—Chicago, Proehl 4-41, Conway 2-18, Wetnight 2-15, Ingram 2-12, Ton. Carter 2-9, Harmon 2-8, Autry 2-4, T. Allen 1-9, Allred 1-5. TAMPA BAY, Williams 4-47, Dunn 3-18, Davis 1-16, Anthony 1-8, Alstott 1-5, Jordan 1-0. MISSED FIELD GOAL ATTEMPTS—None. INTERCEPTIONS—Tampa Bay, Johnson 1-19, Abraham 1-0. KICKOFF RETURNS—Chicago, Smith 6-119, Tampa Bay, Anthony 3-90. PUNT RETURNS—Chicago, Proehl 4-30, Tampa Bay, Williams 6-116. SACKS—Chicago, Mangum 1. TAMPA BAY, Sapp 2, Upshaw 1.

## CHIEFS 25, SAINTS 13

New Orleans ... 0 0 0 6 13  
Kansas City ..... 3 9 0 13 25

First Quarter K.C.—FG, Stoyanovich 30, 11:27.

Second Quarter K.C.—FG, Stoyanovich 25, 6:33. K.C.—Vanover 82 punt return (pass failed), 9:13.

Third Quarter N.O.—Poole 32 pass from Hobert (Brien kick), 9:03.

Fourth Quarter K.C.—Allen 3 run (pass failed), 3:39. K.C.—Popson 3 pass from Gannon (Stoyanovich kick), 5:29. N.O.—Poole 14 pass from Wuerffel (run failed), 12:37.

A—66,772

	N.O.	K.C.
First Downs	17	14
Rushes-Yards	25-103	41-156
Passing	149	20
Punt Returns	3-25	2-130
Kickoff Returns	6-143	2-43
Interception Returns	0-0	3-62
Comp-Att-Int	13-29-3	9-19-0
Sacked-Yards Lost	2-10	3-30
Punts	4-47	6-36
Fumbles-Lost	2-2	1-0
Penalties-Yards	3-14	9-80
Time of Possession	26:51	33:09

## INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING—New Orleans, Zellars 18-47, T. Davis 5-41, Hobert 1-15, Wuerffel 1-0. KANSAS CITY, Bennett 10-37, Hill 10-32, Allen 9-50, Grbac 4-18, Anders 3-4, Richardson 2-11, Tolliver 2 (-minus 1), Aguilar 1-5. PASSING—New Orleans, Hobert 11-25-3-141, Wuerffel 2-4-0-18, Kansas City, Grbac 5-14-0-51, Gannon 3-4-0-7, Tolliver 1-1-0-0 (-minus 8). RECEIVING—New Orleans, Guilford 4-53, Poole 3-49, Hastings 3-34, I. Smith 1-13, Zellars 1-6, T. Davis 1-4. KANSAS CITY, Anders 4-26, Popson 2-15, Gonzalez 1-9, Allen 1-5, Bennett 1-1 (-minus 5). MISSED FIELD GOAL ATTEMPTS—New Orleans, Brien 41. INTERCEPTIONS—Kansas City, McMillian 2-62, Woods 1-0. KICKOFF RETURNS—New Orleans, Guilford 5-132, McCrory 1-11. KANSAS CITY, Horn 1-25, Vanover 1-18. PUNT RETURNS—New Orleans, Guilford 3-25, Kansas City, Vanover 2-130. SACKS—New Orleans, Thomas 2, Tubbs 1. KANSAS CITY, Williams 1, Fields 1.

## REDSKINS 35, EAGLES 32

Philadelphia ... 7 7 3 15 32  
Washington ... 14 14 0 7 35

First Quarter Was.—Pounds 18 fumble return (Jackie kick), 1:30. Was.—D. Green 83 interception return (Jackie kick), 10:03. Phil.—Dunn 31 pass from Hoyer (Bonili kick), 11:42.

Second Quarter Was.—Davis 1 run (Jackie kick), 5:41. Phil.—Garner 9 run (Bonili kick), 4:21. Was.—Bowie 3 run (Jackie kick), 9:19.

Third Quarter Phil.—FG, Bonili 33, 9:48.

## TSN SCOREBOARD

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10	Week 11	Week 12	Week 13	Week 14	Week 15	Week 16	Week 17	NFC EAST	W	L	T	Pct.	PF	PA	Div.	NFC
W-PHI	L-at Jac	L-BAL	L-at STL	W-NO	W-DAL	W-at Ari	W-at Det	W-CIN	x	L-at Ten	W-ARI	T-at Was	L-TB	W-at Phi	W-WAS <sup>†</sup>	W-at Dal	New York	10	5	1	.667	307	265	7-0-1	9-2-1
W-at Car	L-at Pit	W-ARI	x	W-JAC	L-at Phi	W-DAL*	L-at Ten	L-BAL	W-at Chi	W-DET	L-at Dal	T-NYG	L-STL	W-at Ari	L-at NYG <sup>†</sup>	W-PHI	Washington	8	7	1	.533	327	289	4-3-1	7-4-1
L-at NYG	W-GB	L-at Dal*	x	L-at Min	W-WAS	L-at Jac	W-ARI	W-DAL	L-at Ari	L-SF*	T-at Bal	W-PIT	W-CIN	L-NYG	L-at Atl	L-at Was	Philadelphia	6	9	1	.400	317	372	3-5-0	4-8-0
W-at Pit	L-at Ari	W-PHI*	x	W-CHI	L-at NYG	L-at Was*	W-JAC	L-at Phi	L-at SF	W-ARI	W-WAS	L-at GB	L-TEN <sup>‡</sup>	L-CAR*	L-at Cin	L-NYG	Dallas	6	10	0	.375	304	314	3-5-0	4-8-0
L-at Cin	W-DAL	L-at Was	x	L-at TB	L-MIN	L-NYG	L-at Phi	L-TEN	W-PHI	L-at Dal	L-at NYG	W-at Bal	L-PIT	L-WAS	L-at NO	W-ATL	Arizona	4	12	0	.250	283	379	2-6-0	3-9-0
NFC CENTRAL																									
W-CHI*	L-at Phi	W-MIA	W-MIN	L-at Det	W-TB	W-at Chi	x	W-at NE*	W-DET	W-STL	L-at Ind	W-DAL	W-at Min*	W-at TB	W-at Car	W-BUF <sup>†</sup>	Green Bay	13	3	0	.813	422	282	7-1-0	10-2-0
W-SF	W-at Det	W-at Min	W-MIA	W-ARI	L-at GB	L-DET	x	L-MIN	W-at Ind	W-at Atl	W-NE	L-at Chi	W-at NYG	L-GB	L-at NYJ	W-CHI	Tampa Bay	10	6	0	.625	299	263	3-5-0	7-5-0
W-ATL	L-TB	W-at Chi	L-at NO	W-GB	L-at Buf	W-at TB	L-NYG	x	L-at GB	L-at Was	W-MIN	W-IND	W-CHI <sup>‡</sup>	L-at Mia	W-at Min	W-NYJ	Detroit	9	7	0	.563	379	306	6-2-0	7-5-0
W-at Buf	W-at Chi	L-TB	L-at GB	W-PHI	W-at Ari	W-CAR	x	W-at TB	W-NE	W-CHI	L-at Det	L-at NYJ	L-GB*	L-at SF	L-DET	W-IND	Minnesota	9	7	0	.563	354	359	3-5-0	6-6-0
L-at GB*	L-MIN	L-DET	L-at NE	L-at Dal	L-NO	L-GB	x	W-at Mia*	L-WAS	L-at Min	L-NYJ	W-TB	L-at Det <sup>‡</sup>	W-BUF	W-at STL	L-at TB	Chicago	4	12	0	.250	263	421	1-7-0	2-10-0
NFC WEST																									
L-at TB	W-at STL	W-NO	W-ATL	W-at Car*	x	W-STL	W-at Atl	W-at NO	W-DAL	W-at Phi*	W-CAR	W-SD	L-at KC	W-MIN	W-DEN*	L-at Sea	San Francisco	13	3	0	.813	375	265	8-0-0	11-1-0
L-at Det	L-CAR	L-OAK	L-at SF	L-DEN	x	W-at NO	L-SF	L-at Car	W-STL	L-TB	W-at STL	W-NO	W-at Sea	W-at SD	W-PHI	L-at Ari	Atlanta	7	9	0	.438	320	361	4-4-0	5-7-0
L-WAS	W-at Atl	W-at SD	L-KC	L-SF*	x	L-at Min	W-at NO	W-ATL	W-OAK	L-at Den	L-at SF	W-at STL	L-NO	W-at Dal*	L-GB	L-STL <sup>†</sup>	Carolina	7	9	0	.438	265	314	4-4-0	5-7-0
L-at STL	L-SD	L-at SF	W-DET	L-at NYG	W-at Chi	L-ATL	L-CAR	L-SF	x	W-at Oak	W-SEA	L-at Atl	W-at Car	L-STL	W-ARI	L-at KC	New Orleans	6	10	0	.375	237	327	1-7-0	4-8-0
W-NO	L-SF	L-at Den	W-NYG	L-at Oak	x	L-at SF	L-SEA	L-KC	L-at Atl	L-at GB	L-ATL	L-CAR	W-at Was	W-at NO	L-CHI	W-at Car <sup>†</sup>	St. Louis	5	11	0	.313	299	359	3-5-0	5-7-0

\* Monday † Thursday ‡ Saturday § Thanksgiving Day

**Fourth Quarter** Phil.—Garner 1 run (Solomon pass from Hoyer), 8:19. Was.—Westbrook 7 pass from Hostetter (Jackie kick), 10:00. Phil.—Solomon 14 pass from Hoyer (Boniol kick), 13:51.

A—75,939

	Phil.	Was.
First Downs	24	17
Rushes-Yards	36-193	20-78
Passing	208	143
Punt Returns	2-17	1-31
Kickoff Returns	6-154	5-111
Interception Returns	2-26	1-83
Comp-Att-Int	21-31-1	16-24-2
Sacked-Yards Lost	6-47	2-17
Punts	3-39	3-47
Fumbles-Lost	2-2	2-0
Penalties-Yards	7-72	2-20
Time of Possession	35:16	24:44

#### INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

**RUSHING**—Philadelphia, Garner 18-115, Waters 8-30, Staley 6-30, Turner 2-16, Hoyer 2-2, Washington, Davis 12-65, Hostetter 4-0, Bowie 3-23, Mitchell 1-(minus 10). **PASSING**—Philadelphia, Hoyer 21-31-1-255. Washington, Hostetter 16-23-2-160, T. Green 0-1-0-0. **RECEIVING**—Philadelphia, Turner 6-44, Fryar 4-65, Solomon 3-30, Garner 3-23, C. Jones 2-40, Staley 2-22, Dunn 1-31. Washington, Westbrook 5-58, Asher 4-45, Bowie 2-21, Davis 2-(minus 3), Mitchell 1-18, Connell 1-14, Thomas 1-7. **MISSED FIELD GOAL ATTEMPTS**—None. **INTERCEPTIONS**—Philadelphia, Vincent 1-14, Dawkins 1-12, Washington, D. Green 1-83. **KICKOFF RETURNS**—Philadelphia, Staley 3-114, Dunn 2-32, Turner 1-8, Washington, Mitchell 5-111. **PUNT RETURNS**—Philadelphia, Gray 2-17, Washington, Mitchell 1-31. **SACKS**—Philadelphia, Manula 1, H. Thomas 1, Washington, Harvey 2, Pounds 1, Dishman 1, Jones 1, Lang 1/2, Owens 1/2.

#### LIONS 13, JETS 10

N.Y. Jets	10	0	0	0	10
Detroit	0	3	3	7	13

**First Quarter** NYJ.—FG, Hall 32, 7:33. NYJ.—Murrell 14 run (Hall kick), 11:48.

**Second Quarter** Det.—FG, Hanson 44, 15:00.

**Third Quarter** Det.—FG, Hanson 25, 4:15.

**Fourth Quarter** Det.—Sanders 15 run (Hanson kick), 1:49.

A—77,624

	NYJ	Det.
First Downs	20	13
Rushes-Yards	23-108	31-206
Passing	207	95
Punt Returns	5-38	3-27
Kickoff Returns	3-74	2-49
Interception Returns	0-0	3-29
Comp-Att-Int	24-40-3	15-28-0
Sacked-Yards Lost	4-23	3-27
Punts	6-39	8-41
Fumbles-Lost	0-0	1-0
Penalties-Yards	5-40	5-36
Time of Possession	33:48	26:12

#### INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

**RUSHING**—New York, Murrell 12-43, L. Johnson 4-10, Lucas 3-30, Anderson 3-6, O'Donnell 1-19, Detroit, Sanders 23-184, Mitchell 5-12, Vardell 2-7, Rivers 1-3. **PASSING**—New York, O'Donnell 21-35-1-202, Lucas 3-4-1-28, L. Johnson 0-1-1-0, Detroit, Mitchell 15-28-0-122. **RECEIVING**—New York, K. Johnson 6-59, Chrebet 4-67, Baxter 4-32, Murrell 4-15, Brady 3-34, Graham 2-26, Anderson 1-(minus 3), Detroit, Moore 4-39, T. Boyd 3-24, Sanders 3-10, Morton 2-13, Sloan 1-19, Vardell 1-11, McCorvey 1-6. **MISSED FIELD GOAL ATTEMPTS**—None. **INTERCEPTIONS**—Detroit, Rice 1-18, Carrier 1-11, Westbrook 1-0. **KICKOFF RETURNS**—New York, Glenn 3-74, Detroit, Milburn 1-26, Rivers 1-23. **PUNT RETURNS**—New York, L. Johnson 5-38, Detroit, Milburn 3-27. **SACKS**—New York, Ferguson 2, Green 1, Detroit, Rice 1, Porcher 1, Ellis 1, Scroggins 1.

#### OILERS 16, STEELERS 6

Pittsburgh	3	0	0	3	6
Tennessee	3	10	3	0	16

**First Quarter** Ten.—FG, Del Greco 34, 5:49. Pit.—FG, N. Johnson 23, 13:56.

**Second Quarter** Ten.—Thomas 25 run (Del Greco kick), 6:03. Ten.—FG, Del Greco 29, 14:49.

**Third Quarter** Ten.—FG, Del Greco 26, 12:03.

**Fourth Quarter** Pit.—FG, N. Johnson 36, 3:29. A—50,677

	Pit.	Ten.
First Downs	19	14
Rushes-Yards	36-93	29-156
Passing	176	85
Punt Returns	0-0	1-22
Kickoff Returns	5-74	3-61
Interception Returns	1-0	1-9
Comp-Att-Int	14-27-1	10-26-1
Sacked-Yards Lost	0-0	2-17
Punts	4-40	4-38
Fumbles-Lost	4-2	0-0
Penalties-Yards	4-25	6-45
Time of Possession	34:38	25:22

#### INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

**RUSHING**—Pittsburgh, G. Jones 16-21, McAfee 10-27, Stewart 5-20, Wiltman 2-3, Tomczak 1-17, Blackwell 1-3, Marsh 1-2. Tennessee, E. George 16-25, McNair 7-90, Thomas 6-41. **PASSING**—Pittsburgh, Stewart 6-16-1-87, Tomczak 8-11-0-89. Tennessee, McNair 10-26-1-102. **RECEIVING**—Pittsburgh, Thigpen 6-84, C. Johnson 4-30, McAfee 2-44, Sadowski 1-12, Marsh 1-6. Tennessee, Mason 3-47, Kent 2-24, Wycheck 2-16, Davis 1-11, Sanders 1-4, Thomas 1-0. **MISSED FIELD GOAL ATTEMPTS**—None. **INTERCEPTIONS**—Pittsburgh, Scott 1-0. Tennessee, Bowden 1-9. **KICKOFF RETURNS**—Pittsburgh, Blackwell 2-43, Coleman 2-31, Vrabel 1-0. Tennessee, Thomas 3-61. **PUNT RETURNS**—Tennessee, Mason 1-22. **SACKS**—Pittsburgh, Conley 1, Gildon 1/2, Oldham 1/2.

#### BROWNS 38, CHARGERS 3

San Diego	3	0	0	0	3
Denver	0	24	7	7	38

**First Quarter** S.D.—FG, G. Davis 26, 11:31. **Second Quarter** Den.—R. Smith 11 pass from Elway (Elam kick), 1:22. Den.—R. Smith 15 pass from Elway (Elam kick), 5:55. Den.—McCaffrey 1 pass from Elway (Elam kick), 10:51. Den.—FG, Elam 25, 14:47.

**Third Quarter** Den.—Sharpe 68 pass from Elway (Elam kick), 2:31.

**Fourth Quarter** Den.—Loville 6 run (Elam kick), 10:25.

A—69,632

	S.D.	Den.
First Downs	9	24
Rushes-Yards	23-70	33-130
Passing	133	321
Punt Returns	1-3	2-40
Kickoff Returns	7-159	2-58
Interception Returns	1-7	1-20
Comp-Att-Int	15-28-1	23-35-1
Sacked-Yards Lost	2-14	0-0
Punts	6-46	2-53
Fumbles-Lost	0-0	0-0
Penalties-Yards	6-41	5-43
Time of Possession	27:17	32:43

#### INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

**RUSHING**—San Diego, Bynum 10-34, Brown 8-27, Whelan 3-5, Craver 2-4, Denver, Loville 14-66, Hebron 12-47, Brister 4-2, D. Smith 2-11, Griffith 1-4. **PASSING**—San Diego, Whelan 15-28-1-147, Denver, Elway 17-26-1-273, Brister 6-9-0-48. **RECEIVING**—San Diego, Martin 4-46, Metcalf 3-52, Brown 2-16, C. Jones 2-13, Bynum 2-4, Still 1-10, Craver 1-6, Denver, Sharpe 8-162, R. Smith 4-53, McCaffrey 4-32, Hebron 2-41, Loville 2-10, Green 1-12, D. Smith 1-9, Carswell 1-2. **MISSED FIELD GOAL ATTEMPTS**—None. **INTERCEPTIONS**—San Diego, Seau 1-7, Denver, Atwater 1-20. **KICKOFF RETURNS**—



CHRIS O'MEARA / AP

**FINISHING TOUCH: Warren Sapp had two sacks and recovered a Rick Mirer fumble to cap his regular season.**

San Diego, Bynum 6-133, Craver 1-26. Denver, Hebron 1-31, Loville 1-27. **PUNT RETURNS**—San Diego, Metcalf 1-3. Denver, Gordon 2-40. **SACKS**—Denver, Pryce 1, Williams 1.

#### BENGALS 16, RAVENS 14

Baltimore	0	0	7	7	14
Cincinnati	7	0	3	6	16

**First Quarter** Cin.—Battaglia 8 pass from Esiason (Petry kick), 4:50.

**Third Quarter** Bal.—Alexander 83 pass from Zeier (Stover kick), 4:58. Cin.—FG, Petrey 44, 8:09.

**Fourth Quarter** Cin.—Scott 77 pass from Esiason (kick failed), 11:19. Bal.—Green 12 pass from Zeier (Stover kick), 13:20.

A—50,917

	Bal.	Cin.
First Downs	15	18
Rushes-Yards	17-51	29-65
Passing	304	237
Punt Returns	5-25	3-7
Kickoff Returns	4-83	2-45
Interception Returns	0-0	0-0
Comp-Att-Int	28-41-0	21-34-0
Sacked-Yards Lost	7-45	3-17
Punts	9-47	9-43
Fumbles-Lost	1-0	1-0
Penalties-Yards	12-100	6-45
Time of Possession	27:58	32:02

#### INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

**RUSHING**—Baltimore, Morris 13-22, Zeier 2-6, J. Lewis 1-24, Byner 1-(minus 1). Cincinnati, Dillon 24-60, Esiason 3-(minus 2), Carter 1-7, Milne 1-0. **PASSING**—Baltimore, Zeier 28-41-0-349, Cincinnati, Esiason 21-34-0-254. **RECEIVING**—Baltimore, Jackson 7-94, Green 7-62, Alexander 5-111, Morris 5-25, J. Lewis 3-48, Byner 1-9. Cincinnati, Scott 6-129, Dunn 5-36, Dillon 3-15, Battaglia 2-42, Carter 2-8, Hundon 1-12, Milne 1-7, McGee 1-5. **MISSED FIELD GOAL ATTEMPTS**—Baltimore, Stover 44. **INTERCEPTIONS**—None. **KICKOFF RETURNS**—Baltimore, J. Lewis 2-44, Roe 2-39, Cincinnati, Bienenmy 2-45. **PUNT RETURNS**—Baltimore, J. Lewis 5-25, Cincinnati, Myers 3-7. **SACKS**—Baltimore, R. Lewis 1, Washington 1, Team 1, Cincinnati, Dixon 3/2, Shade 1, Wilson 1, Orlando 1, Francis 1/2.

#### CARDINALS 29, FALCONS 26

Atlanta	14	3	3	6	26
Arizona	7	7	0	15	29

**First Quarter** Atl.—Emanuel 38 pass from Chandler (Andersen kick), 1:40. Ariz.—Gedney 1 pass from Plummer (Nedney kick), 7:13. Atl.—Mathis 17 pass from Chandler (Andersen kick), 13:55.

**Second Quarter** Atl.—FG, Andersen 25, 6:52. Ariz.—Plummer 1 run (Nedney kick), 12:02.

**Third Quarter** Atl.—FG, Andersen 31, 9:02.

**Fourth Quarter** Atl.—FG, Andersen 20, 10:4. Atl.—FG, Andersen 26, 6:19. Ariz.—R. Moore 21 pass from Plummer (Nedney kick), 10:05.

Ariz.—Centers 1 pass from Plummer (Plummer run), 14:55.

A—32,003

	Atl.	Ariz.
First Downs	22	20
Rushes-Yards	40-189	18-66
Passing	167	231
Punt Returns	2-32	0-0
Kickoff Returns	3-53	7-207
Interception Returns	2-15	1-0
Comp-Att-Int	13-20-1	19-39-2
Sacked-Yards Lost	3-9	2-6
Punts	2-35	4-46
Fumbles-Lost	1-0	0-0
Penalties-Yards	6-53	9-75
Time of Possession	36:29	23:31

#### INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

**RUSHING**—Atlanta, Anderson 33-152, Chandler 5-35, Christian 1-2, Green 1-0, Arizona, R. Moore 10-36, Centers 3-20, Plummer 3-8, C. Smith 1-2, McElroy 1-0. **PASSING**—Atlanta, Chandler 13-19-0-176, Anderson 0-1-1-0. Arizona, Plummer 19-39-2-237. **RECEIVING**—Atlanta, Emanuel 5-75, Anderson 4-36, Mathis 3-49, Kozlowski 1-16, Arizona, R. Moore 7-91, Sanders 4-82, Centers 4-32, K. Williams 2-25, Carter 1-6, Gedney 1-1. **MISSED FIELD GOAL ATTEMPTS**—None. **INTERCEPTIONS**—Atlanta, White 1-11, C. Smith 1-4, Arizona, Bennett 1-0. **KICKOFF RETURNS**—Atlanta, Hanspard 3-53. Arizona, K. Williams 7-207. **PUNT RETURNS**—Atlanta, Kinchen 2-32. **SACKS**—Atlanta, Owens 2, Arizona, M. Smith 2, McKinnon 1.

#### SEAHAWKS 38, 49ERS 9

San Francisco	6	0	3	0	9
Seattle	7	14	7	10	38

**First Quarter** S.F.—FG, Anderson 33, 4:35. S.F.—FG, Anderson 40, 12:34. Sea.—Galloway 37 pass from Moon (Peterson kick), 14:54.

**Second Quarter** Sea.—McKnight 21 pass from Moon (Peterson kick), 3:55. Sea.—

Pritchard 21 pass from Moon (Peterson kick), 6:58.

**Third Quarter** S.F.—FG, Anderson 23, 7:50. Sea.—Galloway 35 pass from Moon (Peterson kick), 11:35.

**Fourth Quarter** Sea.—FG, Peterson 39, 1:47. Sea.—Kitna 1 run (Peterson kick), 12:06.

A—66,253

	S.F.	Sea.
First Downs	17	24
Rushes-Yards	24-125	25-124
Passing	199	283
Punt Returns	1-(-1)	3-11
Kickoff Returns	7-167	4-109
Interception Returns	0-0	1-0
Comp-Att-Int	18-33-1	24-33-0
Sacked-Yards Lost	2-17	5-37
Punts	5-36	3-45
Fumbles-Lost	3-1	1-0
Penalties-Yards	7-92	5-45
Time of Possession	28:52	31:08

#### INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

**RUSHING**—San Francisco, Kirby 11-47, Levy 8-61, Edwards 3-12, Brohm 1-4, Druckenmiller 1-1. Seattle, Warren 17-99, Smith 4-18, Broussard 2-7, Kitna 2-0. **PASSING**—San Francisco, S. Young 7-12-0-87, Druckenmiller 5-11-1-64, Brohm 6-10-0-65, Seattle, Moon 16-25-0-232, Kitna 8-8-0-88. **RECEIVING**—San Francisco, Stokes 4-50, Edwards 4-38, Fann 3-50, Owens 2-37, Levy 2-8, Uwaezueke 1-16, Jones 1-12, Kirby 1-5. Seattle, Galloway 6-101, Pritchard 6-90, McKnight 3-52, Crumpler 3-38, Broussard 1-9, Fauria 1-9, Harris 1-9, Hobbs 1-9, Smith 1-2, Warren 1-1. **MISSED FIELD GOAL ATTEMPTS**—None. **INTERCEPTIONS**—Seattle, W. Williams 1-0. **KICKOFF RETURNS**—San Francisco, Levy 7-167, Seattle, Broussard 4-109. **PUNT RETURNS**—San Francisco, Uwaezueke 1-(minus 1), Seattle, Davis 3-11. **SACKS**—San Francisco, Greene 2, Maxie 1, Doleman 1, Barker 1. Seattle, Sinclair 2.

#### SATURDAY'S GAMES

#### RAMS 30, PANTHERS 18

St. Louis	10	6	7	7	30
Carolina	0	0	8	10	18

**First Quarter** St.L.—Wiegert 0 fumble return (Wilkins kick), 8:01. St.L.—FG, Wilkins 49, 14:32.

**Second Quarter** St.L.—FG, Wilkins 42, 4:29. St.L.—FG, Wilkins 47, 15:00.

**Third Quarter** St.L.—Thompson 7 run (Wilkins kick), 4:59. Car.—Caruth 35 pass from Collins (Muhammad pass from Collins), 8:14.

**Fourth Quarter** St.L.—Conwell 1 pass from Banks (Wilkins kick), 3:29. Car.—E. Mills 2 pass from Beuerlein (Johnson run), 9:52.

Car.—Safety, Horan out of end zone, forced by Stone, 14:14.

A—58,101

	St.L.	Car.
First Downs	23	21
Rushes-Yards	39-147	20-83
Passing	149	233
Punt Returns	2-2	1-10
Kickoff Returns	2-45	7-146
Interception Returns	3-9	0-0
Comp-Att-Int	16-25-0	21-42-3
Sacked-Yards Lost	1-14	3-28
Punts	4-45	4-48
Fumbles-Lost	1-0	1-0
Penalties-Yards	7-53	12-86
Time of Possession	34:09	25:51

#### INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

**RUSHING**—St. Louis, J. Moore 27-112, Thompson 3-11, Lee 3-10, Banks 2-11, Hayward 2-1, Kennison 1-5, Horan 1-(minus 3), Carolina, Lane 14-78, Collins 2-(minus 5), Caruth 1-3, Johnson 1-3, Beuerlein 1-2, Greene 1-2. **PASSING**—St. Louis, Banks 16-

## AFC

## TSN SCOREBOARD

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10	Week 11	Week 12	Week 13	Week 14	Week 15	Week 16	Week 17	AFC EAST	W	L	T	Pct.	PF	PA	Div.	AFC						
W-SD	W-at Ind	W-NYJ	W-CHI	x	L-at Den*	W-BUF	L-at NYJ	L-GB*	L-at Min	W-at Buf	L-at TB	W-MIA	W-IND	W-at Jac	L-PIT†	at Mia*	New England	9	6	0	.600	355	277	6-1-0	8-3-0						
W-IND	W-TEN	L-at GB	L-at TB	x	W-KC	W-at NYJ	W-at Bal	L-CHI*	L-at Buf	W-NYJ	W-BUF*	L-at NE	W-at Oak	W-DET	L-at Ind	NE*	Miami	9	6	0	.600	327	313	4-3-0	8-3-0						
W-at Sea	L-BUF	L-at NE	W-OAK	W-at Cin	W-at Ind	L-MIA	W-NE	x	W-BAL	L-at Mia	W-at Chi	W-MIN	L-at Buf	L-IND	W-TB	L-at Det	New York	9	7	0	.563	348	287	2-6-0	6-6-0						
L-MIN	W-at NYJ	L-at KC	W-IND	x	W-DET	L-at NE	W-at Ind*	L-DEN	W-MIA	L-NE	L-at Mia*	L-at Ten	W-NYJ	L-at Chi	L-JAC	L-at GB†	Buffalo	6	10	0	.375	255	365	5-3-0	5-7-0						
L-at Mia	L-NE	L-SEA	L-at Buf	x	L-NYJ	L-at Pit	L-BUF*	L-at SD	L-TB	L-CIN	W-GB	L-at Det	L-at NE	W-at NYJ	W-MIA	L-at Min	Indianapolis	3	13	0	.188	313	401	2-6-0	2-10-0						
AFC CENTRAL																															
W-at Bal	W-NYG	x	W-PIT*	L-at Was	W-CIN	W-PHI	L-at Dal	L-at Pit	W-at Ten	W-KC	W-TEN	L-at Cin	W-BAL	L-NE	W-at Buf	W-at Oak	Jacksonville	11	5	0	.688	394	318	6-2-0	9-3-0						
L-DAL	W-WAS	x	L-at Jac*	W-TEN	W-at Bal	W-IND	W-at Cin	W-JAC	L-at KC*	W-BAL	W-CIN	L-at Phi	W-at Ari	W-DEN	W-at NE†	L-at Ten	Pittsburgh	11	5	0	.688	372	307	6-2-0	9-3-0						
W-OAK	L-at Mia	x	L-BAL	L-at Pit	L-at Sea	W-CIN	W-WAS	W-at Ari	L-JAC	W-NYG	L-at Jac	W-BUF	W-at Dal§	L-at Cin†	L-at Bal	W-PIT	Tennessee	8	8	0	.500	333	310	2-6-0	4-8-0						
W-ARI	L-at Bal	x	L-at Den	L-NYJ	L-at Jac	L-at Ten	L-PIT	L-at NYG	W-SD	W-at Ind	L-at Pit	W-JAC	L-at Phi	W-TEN†	W-DAL	W-BAL	Cincinnati	7	9	0	.438	355	405	3-5-0	5-7-0						
L-JAC	W-CIN	W-at NYG	W-at Ten	L-at SD	L-PIT	x	L-MIA	W-at Was	L-at NYJ	L-at Pit	T-PHI	L-ARI	L-at Jac	W-SEA	W-TEN	L-at Cin	Baltimore	6	9	1	.400	326	345	3-5-0	4-8-0						
AFC WEST																															
L-at Den	W-at Oak*W-BUF	W-at Car	W-SEA	L-at Mia	x	W-SD†	W-at STL	W-PIT*	L-at Jac	W-DEN	W-at Sea	W-SF	W-OAK	W-at SD	W-NO	Kansas City	13	3	0	.813	375	232	7-1-0	9-3-0							
W-KC	W-at Sea	W-STL	W-CIN	L-at Atl	W-NE*	x	L-at Oak	W-at Buf	W-SEA	W-CAR	L-at KC	W-OAK*	W-at SD	L-at Pit	L-at SF*	W-SD	Denver	12	4	0	.750	472	287	6-2-0	9-3-0						
L-NYJ	L-DEN	W-at Ind	W-SD	L-at KC	W-TEN	x	W-at STL	W-OAK	L-at Den	W-at SD	L-at NO	L-KC	L-ATL	L-at Bal	W-at Oak	W-SF	Seattle	8	8	0	.500	365	362	4-4-0	6-6-0						
L-at Ten	L-KC*	W-at Atl	L-at NYJ	W-STL	L-SD	x	W-DEN	L-at Sea	L-at Car	L-NO	W-at SD	L-at Den*	L-MIA	L-at KC	L-SEA	L-JAC	Oakland	4	12	0	.250	324	419	2-6-0	2-10-0						
L-at NE	W-at NO	L-CAR	L-at Sea	W-BAL	W-at Oak	x	L-at KC†	W-IND	L-at Cin	L-SEA	L-OAK	L-at SF	L-DEN	L-ATL	L-KC	L-at Den	San Diego	4	12	0	.250	266	425	1-7-0	3-9-0						

25-0-163, Carolina, Collins 11-25-3-132, Beuerlein 10-17-0-129. **RECEIVING**—St. Louis, Bruce 5-43, Lee 4-37, Conwell 3-39, Small 2-30, Laing 1-11, Kennison 1-3, Carolina, E. Mills 5-66, Caruth 4-66, Mangum 4-56, Muhammad 4-45, Johnson 2-15, Greene 2-13. **MISSED FIELD GOAL ATTEMPTS**—None. **INTERCEPTIONS**—St. Louis, Lyle 2-9, M. Jones 1-0. **KICKOFF RETURNS**—St. Louis, Thompson 2-45, Carolina, Bates 6-141, Poole 1-5. **PUNT RETURNS**—St. Louis, Kennison 2-2, Carolina, Poole 1-10. **SACKS**—St. Louis, Carter 2, Williams 1, Carolina, Minter 1/2, Saleh 1/2.

### PACKERS 31, BILLS 21

Buffalo ..... 0 0 8 13 21  
Green Bay ..... 14 7 3 7 31

**First Quarter** G.B.—T. Davis 0 fumble return (Longwell kick), 1:37. G.B.—Freeman 4 pass from Favre (Longwell kick), 11:41.

**Second Quarter** G.B.—T. Davis 2 pass from Favre (Longwell kick), 7:34.

**Third Quarter** G.B.—FG, Longwell 35, 11:22. Buf.—A. Smith 5 run (Riemersma pass from Van Pelt), 14:37.

**Fourth Quarter** Buf.—A. Smith 1 run (pass failed), 3:36. G.B.—Sharper 20 interception return (Longwell kick), 10:18. Buf.—Van Pelt 1 run (Christie kick), 12:55.

A—60,108

	Buf.	G.B.
First Downs	21	14
Rushes-Yards	21-51	34-102
Passing	274	174
Punt Returns	3-37	2-25
Kickoff Returns	5-77	4-83
Interception Returns	0-0	3-69
Comp-Att-Int	24-45-3	17-28-0
Sacked-Yards Lost	1-10	1-15
Punts	7-30	6-45
Fumbles-Lost	3-1	3-3
Penalties-Yards	10-93	13-115
Time of Possession	27:52	32:08

### INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

**RUSHING**—Buffalo, A. Smith 10-20, Thomas 7-28, Van Pelt 2-4, Holmes 2-(minus 1), Green Bay, Levens 22-71, Hayden 7-23, Pederson 3-(minus 4), Henderson 1-3, Favre 1-(minus 1).

**PASSING**—Buffalo, Van Pelt 23-44-3-255, Mohr 5-10-0-29, Green Bay, Favre 12-18-0-156, Bono 5-10-0-29. **RECEIVING**—Buffalo, Early 7-120, Johnson 4-44, Riemersma 4-42, A. Smith 4-32, Moulds 3-31, Reese 1-13, Holmes 1-2, Henderson 3-18, Chimura 2-17, Levens 1-2, T. Davis 1-2. **MISSED FIELD GOAL ATTEMPTS**—Green Bay, Freeman 6-63, R. Brooks 4-83.

**INTERCEPTIONS**—Green Bay, Longwell 45. **INTERCEPTIONS**—Green Bay, Prior 1-49, Sharper 1-20, Ty Williams 1-0. **KICKOFF RETURNS**—Buffalo, Moulds 3-47, Holmes 2-30, Green Bay, Schroeder 2-57, Hayden 1-23, Sharper 1-3.

**PUNT RETURNS**—Buffalo, Burns 2-37, Jackson 1-0, Green Bay, Sharper 2-25. **SACKS**—Buffalo, Holecek 1, Green Bay, White 1.

## MONDAY'S GAME

### 49ERS 34, BRONCOS 17

Denver ..... 10 0 7 0 17  
San Francisco... 0 14 10 10 34

**First Quarter** Den.—Davis 4 run (Elam kick), 6:46. Den.—FG, Elam 49, 13:29.

**Second Quarter** S.F.—Rice 14 pass from S. Young (Anderson kick), 8:07. S.F.—Kirby 1 run (Anderson kick), 14:38.

**Third Quarter** Den.—Hebron 1 run (Elam kick), 4:30. S.F.—FG, Anderson 32, 8:01. S.F.—Hanks 55 interception return (Anderson kick), 9:03.

**Fourth Quarter** S.F.—FG, Anderson 20, 5:55. S.F.—Greene 40 fumble return (Anderson kick), 10:55.

A—68,461

	Den.	S.F.
First Downs	15	18
Rushes-Yards	23-96	26-58
Passing	141	265
Punt Returns	1-0	4-19
Kickoff Returns	7-152	4-86
Interception Returns	0-0	2-110
Comp-Att-Int	16-41-2	22-34-0
Sacked-Yards Lost	1-9	2-11
Punts	4-49	5-36
Fumbles-Lost	2-1	1-1
Penalties-Yards	5-46	11-95
Time of Possession	27:46	32:14

### INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

**RUSHING**—Denver, Hebron 12-64, Davis 10-28, Griffith 1-4, San Francisco, Kirby 15-27, Floyd 7-19, S. Young 3-11, Levy 1-1. **PASSING**—Denver, Elway 16-41-2-150, San Francisco, S. Young 22-34-0-276. **RECEIVING**—Denver, R. Smith 5-73, Sharpe 5-60, Davis 2-0, Hanks 1-17, McCaffrey 1-5, Carswell 1-0, Hebron 1-(minus 5), San Francisco, Kirby 6-76, Jones 4-68, Rice 3-40, Owens 3-39, Stokes 3-32, Floyd 3-21. **MISSED FIELD GOAL ATTEMPTS**—Denver, Elam 44, 29, San Francisco, Anderson 35. **INTERCEPTIONS**—San Francisco, Hanks 1-55, Woodall 1-55. **KICKOFF RETURNS**—Denver, Hebron 4-50, Loville 3-102, San Francisco, Levy 4-86. **PUNT RETURNS**—Denver, Gordon 1-0, San Francisco, Levy 2-19, Uwaezuoke 1-0, Woodson 1-0. **SACKS**—Denver, Williams 2, San Francisco, Greene 1.

### RUSHING

	Atts.	Yds.	Avg.	TDs.
Sanders, Det.	335	2053	6.1	11
Davis, Den.	369	1750	4.7	15
Bettis, Pit.	375	1665	4.4	7
Levens, G.B.	329	1435	4.4	7
E. George, Ten.	357	1399	3.9	6
Kaufman, Oak.	272	1294	4.8	6
R. Smith, Min.	232	1266	5.5	6
Martin, N.E.	274	1160	4.2	4
Dillon, Cin.	233	1129	4.8	10
Watters, Phi.	285	1110	3.9	7
Murrell, NYJ	300	1086	3.6	7
E. Smith, Dal.	261	1074	4.1	4
Faulk, Ind.	264	1054	4.0	7
R. Harris, Chi.	275	1033	3.8	10
Hearst, S.F.	234	1019	4.4	4
Anderson, Atl.	290	1002	3.5	7
Dunn, T.B.	224	978	4.4	4
Brown, S.D.	253	945	3.7	4
Abdul-Jabbar, Mia.	270	859	3.2	15
Warren, Sea.	200	847	4.2	4
A. Smith, Buf.	194	840	4.3	8
Means, Jac.	244	823	3.4	9
Lane, Car.	182	809	4.4	7
Morris, Bal.	204	774	3.8	4
Allen, Was.	210	724	3.4	4
Way, NYG	151	698	4.6	4
McNair, Ten.	101	674	6.7	8
Phillips, Mia.	196	669	3.4	8
Alstott, T.B.	176	665	3.8	7
Thomas, Buf.	154	643	4.2	1
Wheatley, NYG	152	583	3.8	4
Davis, Was.	141	567	4.0	3
Stewart, Jac.	136	555	4.1	8
Zellers, N.O.	156	552	3.5	4
Hill, K.C.	157	550	3.5	0
Gamer, Phi.	116	547	4.7	3
Barber, NYG	136	511	3.8	3
Allen, K.C.	124	505	4.1	11
Stewart, Pit.	88	476	5.4	11
S. Williams, Dal.	121	468	3.9	2
Carter, Cin.	128	464	3.6	7
Bates, N.O.	119	440	3.7	4
McElroy, Ariz.	135	424	3.1	2
Broussard, Sea.	70	418	6.0	5
Kirby, S.F.	125	418	3.3	6

### SCORING — TDS

	Tot. Rush.	Pass.	Ret.	Pts.
Abdul-Jabbar, Mia.	16	15	1	96
Davis, Den.	15	15	0	96
Sanders, Det.	14	11	3	84
Carter, Min.	13	0	13	84
Levens, G.B.	12	7	5	74
Freeman, G.B.	12	0	12	72
Galloway, Sea.	12	0	12	72
Jett, Oak.	12	0	12	72
R. Smith, Den.	12	0	12	72
Allen, K.C.	11	11	0	66
Stewart, Pit.	11	11	0	66
Alstott, T.B.	10	7	3	60
Anderson, Atl.	10	7	3	60
Dillon, Cin.	10	10	0	60
R. Harris, Chi.	10	10	0	60
Alexander, Bal.	9	0	9	54
Bettis, Pit.	9	7	2	54
Emanuel, Atl.	9	0	9	54
Irvin, Dal.	9	0	9	54
Means, Jac.	9	0	9	54
Stewart, Jac.	9	8	1	54
Kirby, S.F.	8	6	1	52
Moore, Det.	8	0	8	50
R. Moore, Ariz.	8	0	8	50
Calloway, NYG	8	0	8	48
Coates, N.E.	8	0	8	48
Faulk, Ind.	8	7	1	48
Kaufman, Oak.	8	6	2	48

### SCORING — KICKING

	XP-XPA	FG-FGA	Pts.
Hollis, Jac.	41/41	31/36	134
Cunningham, Dal.	24/24	34/37	126
Anderson, S.F.	38/38	29/36	125
Elam, Den.	46/46	26/36	124
Hall, NYJ	36/36	28/41	120
Longwell, G.B.	48/48	24/30	120
Blanchard, Ind.	21/21	32/41	117
Hanson, Det.	39/40	26/29	117
Del Greco, Ten.	32/32	27/35	113
Stoyanovich, K.C.	35/36	26/27	113
Vinatieri, N.E.	38/38	25/29	113
Mare, Mia.	33/33	26/33	111
Stover, Bal.	32/32	26/34	110
G. Davis, S.D.	31/32	26/34	109
Wilkins, St.L.	32/32	25/37	107
N. Johnson, Pit.	40/40	22/25	106
Anderson, Atl.	35/35	23/27	104
Peterson, Sea.	37/37	22/28	103
Boniol, Phi.	33/33	22/31	99
Christie, Buf.	21/21	24/30	93
Daluiso, NYG	27/29	22/32	93

### PUNT RETURNS

	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TDs.
J. Lewis, Bal.	28	437	15.6	2
Gordon, Den.	40	543	13.6	3
Palmer, Min.	34	444	13.1	0
Williams, T.B.	46	597	13.0	1
Sanders, Dal.	33	407	12.3	1
L. Johnson, NYJ	51	619	12.1	1
Mitchell, Was.	38	442	11.6	1
K. Williams, Ariz.	40	462	11.6	0
Barlow, Jac.	36	412	11.4	0
Uwaezuoke, S.F.	34	373	11.0	0
Vanover, K.C.	35	383	10.9	1
Meggett, N.E.	41	447	10.9	0
Metcalf, S.D.	45	489	10.9	3
Gulford, N.O.	47	498	10.6	0
Jordan, Mia.	26	273	10.5	0
Schroeder, G.B.	33	342	10.4	0

### TEAM STATISTICS

For rushing and passing, figure is average per game; for punt and kickoff returns, figure is average per return; and for sacks and turnovers, figure is season total. Figure in bold is conference-leading total.

	Rushing		Passing		Yds/Play		KO Ret		Punt Ret		Sacks		TO	
	Off.	Def.	Off.	Def.	Off.	Def.	Off.	Def.	Off.	Def.	By/Us	Op/Ow		
ARIZONA	78.4	136.3	216.1	202.9	4.4	5.2	24.2	22.5	11.2	11.0	34	78	20	42
ATLANTA	102.7	104.1	192.1	215.0	4.8	5.3	23.5	22.4	9.3	2.6	55	54	28	24
BALTIMORE	99.3	105.6	231.4	229.6	5.1	5.0	20.2	22.8	13.4	8.7	42	37	28	33
BUFFALO	111.4	112.0	179.7	191.3	4.6	4.7	19.7	25.2	8.9	8.3	46	46	22	42
CAROLINA	109.9	123.3	177.8	187.9	4.5	4.9	23.4	23.2	7.6	11.3	36	44	22	39
CHICAGO	109.1	116.1	202.9	189.4	4.4	5.2	21.4	23.8	7.0	14.0	38	43	29	41
CINCINNATI	122.9	138.9	207.3	216.2	5.3	5.2	21.4	21.0	7.7	11.6	35	46	22	22
DALLAS	102.3	124.6	196.3	157.6	4.7	4.4	24.1	18.0	10.9	9.1	38	39	19	23
DENVER	148.6	112.7	218.4	179.3	5.5	4.9	22.3	20.5	13.5	9.0	44	35	31	21
DETROIT	154.0	114.6	208.4	194.6	5.6	4.8	23.1	20.5	9.0	8.5	43	41	25	28
GREEN BAY	119.3	117.3	231.6	184.4	5.6	4.6	22.8	20.5	9.2	8.0	41	26	32	32
INDIANAPOLIS	107.9	127.1	196.4	176.3	4.7	5.2	21.2	23.8	8.0	11.4	36	62	25	28
JACKSONVILLE	107.5	108.4	231.5	219.0	5.4	5.1	21.3	22.5	11.4	8.3	48	40	29	20
KANSAS CITY	135.7	101.3	180.8	203.7	4.8	5.0	24.9	20.9	10.9	6.5	54	32	34	20
MIAMI	86.7	117.7	235.9	226.1	5.0	5.4	20.4	19.5	10.2	7.8	29	18	25	19
MINNESOTA	127.6	123.9	207.1	231.5	5.2	5.5	21.8	20.9	13.1	11.6	44	33	27	22
NEW ENGLAND	94.5	104.9	226.0	214.4	5.3	4.6	25.6	22.2	10.9	11.5	42	28	31	20
NEW ORLEANS	91.3	110.3	161.5	180.1	4.4	4.3	23.7	21.9	10.3	14.1	59	50	31	55
NY GIANTS	124.3	90.7	157.8	226.0	4.4	4.7	18.9	23.7	9.7	9.4	54	32	44	19
NY JETS	92.8	118.7	202.6	213.8	4.5	5.0	22.9	21.0	11.4	9.8	29	48	25	22
OAKLAND	99.3	140.4	219.6	241.9	5.4	5.5	21.0	23.4	7.8	8.3	30	58	22	24
PHILADELPHIA	121.4	125.6	227.9	182.7	5.0	4.9	22.0	23.5	7.5	10.7	43	64	26	32
PITTSBURGH	154.9	82.4	191.4	211.7	5.2	4.7	22.3	21.0	6.9	11.8	48	20	34	33
SAN DIEGO	88.5	106.1	193.1	216.8	4.4	4.9	21.2	24.1	10.4	10.7	27	51	26	35
SAN FRAN.	123.1	85.4	196.4	165.4	5.1	4.2	22.7	21.3	11.8	7.5	54	44	41	23
SEATTLE	112.5	108.2	247.4	194.9	5.5	5.1	20.3	23.1	6.7	12.2	42	35	29	32
ST. LOUIS	97.6	104.8	199.9	211.2	4.7	5.0	21.4	23.4	6.8	10.3	38	44	39	30
TAMPA BAY	120.9	101.1	152.6	188.3	4.8	4.7	20.7	21.8	12.6	9.2	44	32	26	22
TENNESSEE	150.9	98.3	156.6	228.6	5.0	5.3	19.8	21.5	7.6	11.9	35	32	32	26
WASHINGTON	100.9	138.3	211.4	176.1	4.8	4.8	21.7	22.6	11.6	7.2	37	33	30	29

# AFC East

Teams are listed alphabetically by nickname



ED NESSEN/TSN

**STILL A FORCE:** The Bills had a disappointing season, but don't blame Bruce Smith.

## The envelope, please ...

**Best coaching job:** Even though injuries forced the Bills to switch from a 3-4 to a 4-3 in midseason, coordinator Wade Phillips found a way to make Buffalo's defense better this year than last. Bill Parcells' turnaround of the Jets also can't be overlooked.

**Best front-office job:** The Patriots solidified both of their lines by signing free agents Henry Thomas and Zefross Moss. They also held up the Jets when their division rivals wanted to sign Parcells; New England will receive multiple draft picks in return.

**Best player, offense:** Still Dan Marino. Drew Bledsoe had slightly better numbers, but he had much more to work with. Marino had to do it with a subpar offensive line, no running game to speak of and inconsistent receivers.

**Best player, defense:** Still Bruce Smith. And no one is a close second.

**Best player, special teams:** Larry Whigham. He's a primary reason the Patriots are solid on their coverage and return units.

**Best rookie:** Derrick Rodgers, Dolphins. Along with Zach Thomas in '96, he gave Miami an excellent first-year linebacker for the second straight season. Rodgers is a late bloomer who moved from defensive end.

**Best personnel move:** The Colts signed defensive end Dan Fouts before training camp at the bargain price of \$1 million for one season. Then he had a career year.

**Worst personnel move:** The Colts allowed a crumbling offensive line to deteriorate further in the offseason by allowing Kirk Lowdermilk to leave. Then they counted on rookies Tarik Glenn and Adam Meadows to bail them out even though Glenn missed all of training camp in a contract holdout. —Dan Pompei

## Bills

6-10 / 4th

### Solid defense couldn't make up for the offense



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** Todd Collins flopped as a starting quarterback. He struggled reading defenses, and he made poor throws. In his defense, though, the offensive line didn't give him a chance to get comfortable in the pocket. Left guard Ruben Brown didn't deserve his Pro Bowl invitation, and John Fina proved again he's not a left tackle. Center Dusty Zeigler was an ineffective replacement for retired Kent Hull. Right guard Corbin Lacina shouldn't be starting for any team, and right tackle Jerry Ostroski is more suited to play guard. Rookie running back Antowain Smith, who showed speed, power and a knack for making the big play, was perhaps the only offensive positive. The offense wasted a terrific yearlong performance from the defense. The

#### GRADING OUT 1997 season

**OFFENSE D-** One of the worst showings in team history. Every position deserves some blame.

**DEFENSE B** Even with a switch to the 4-3, the defense kept the team in almost every game.

**STRATEGY C** Using two tight ends didn't work; but going to the 4-3 at midseason was smart.

front line of Bruce Smith, Ted Washington and Phil Hansen distinguished itself as one of the league's best. And Sean Moran, who became the fourth starting lineman when the team switched to a 4-3 defense at midseason because of injuries at linebacker, played well. However, the 4-3 scheme hurt

linebacker Bryce Paup, who became more involved in pass coverage and less in pass rushing.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** The team will enter 1998 looking for a new starting quarterback. Also, a major upgrade is needed on the offensive line. The club may address the line in free agency and in the first round. Running back Thurman Thomas, who will be 32 in May, could return, but even if he does, Smith has to be given the starting job. And if the club plans to stick with coordinator Dan Henning's two-tight end approach, the team will need two starting tight ends, because Lonnie Johnson and Jay Riemersma were inept. On defense, there is a big question at inside linebacker. The neck injury of Chris Spielman is potentially career-threatening, though he promises to return, and Damien Covington had knee surgery. If they can't play, the team may have to stick with the 4-3. Washington and Paup, both Pro Bowl choices and free agents, need to be re-signed, with a major emphasis on Washington. —Sal Maiorana

#### BUFFALO

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
Collins	391	215	55.0	2367	771	12	13	69.5	39
Van Pelt	124	60	48.4	684	39	2	10	37.2	4

RUSHING	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
A. Smith	194	840	4.3	8
Thomas	154	643	4.2	1
Holmes	22	106	4.8	2

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Reed	60	880	14.7	5
Early	60	853	14.2	5
Johnson	41	340	8.3	2

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
Christie	21	21	24	30	93

PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Blk.
Mohr	90	3764	41.8	1

KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Moulds	43	921	21.4	0

PUNT RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Burris	21	198	9.4	0

**SACKS:** B. Smith 14.0, Paup 9.5, Hansen 6.0.  
**INTERCEPTIONS:** Schulz 2, Burris 2, Irvin 2, Moran 2.

## Colts

3-13 / 5th

### Grave start puts Infante, Tobin in hot seats



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** It was December 14 before the Colts won their third game. An 0-10 start had the team spiraling toward the offseason instead of the postseason, and it fueled criticism of coach Lindy Infante and director of football operations Bill Tobin. At the root of the team's failure was an offensive line that didn't begin to assert itself until the final third of the season. Management was unable to get first-round pick Tarik Glenn signed until two weeks before the season opener. That kept him from fulfilling the team's draft-day hopes—the 345-pounder stepping in at left tackle—and impaired the overall progress of the line. The line's delayed effectiveness resulted in a domino effect. Jim Harbaugh and Marshall Faulk struggled to throw and run with any consistency, the entire

#### GRADING OUT 1997 season

**OFFENSE D** Too many sacks, penalties and red-zone failures, not enough TDs.

**DEFENSE C-** Feast or famine. Held Jets to 126 yards but allowed at least 28 points nine times.

**STRATEGY D** The coaching staff was unable to compensate for poor early play.

offense struggled to score touchdowns and the defense couldn't pick up the slack.

Among the few silver linings was defensive end Dan Fouts, who was added for depth and instead built a case for a prominent role. He started in Game 6 and compiled 10½ sacks in his first nine starts. The contrast: In his previous four seasons, he totaled nine sacks.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** Anticipate changes. The only question: How drastic will they be? The first order of business will be for owner Jim Irsay to determine the fates of Tobin and Infante. Both are under contract through 1998, but both could be gone if Irsay decides wholesale changes are required. Tobin, the architect of the 1995-96 playoff teams, should return. No one gave Infante much chance of seeing the end of '97—let alone '98—but the late-season surge might have saved his job. If so, look for the team to attempt to ease his role as coach/offensive coordinator next year. The byproduct of a poor season will be the first pick in the draft. Harbaugh will be 34 in '98, so management might try for Peyton Manning or Ryan Leaf. If not, the pick should be used for an impact receiver or a pass rusher. Despite Fouts' contributions this year, the team still needs to assert more pressure on the quarterback. —Mike Chappell

#### INDIANAPOLIS

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
Harbaugh	309	189	61.2	2060	58	10	4	86.2	41
Holcomb	73	45	61.6	454	41	1	8	44.3	11

RUSHING	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Faulk	264	1054	4.0	7
Crockett	95	300	3.2	1
Harbaugh	36	206	5.7	0

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Harrison	73	866	11.9	6
Dawkins	68	804	11.8	2
Faulk	47	471	10.0	1

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
Blanchard	21	21	32	41	117

PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Blk.
Gardocki	67	3034	45.3	0

KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Bailey	55	1206	21.9	0

PUNT RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Stablein	17	133	7.8	0

**SACKS:** Foutsman 10.5, E. Johnson 4.5, Fontenot 3.5.  
**INTERCEPTIONS:** Coryatt 2, Belser 2, C. Gray 2.

# Dolphins

9-6 / T 1st

## Despite the injuries, it was a pretty good year



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** The team lived up to reasonable expectations by being in the playoff hunt all season. The disappointment is that a postseason berth could have been

wrapped up well in advance of the final week of the season. Losses to Chicago, at Buffalo and at New England earlier in the season (each by a field goal) easily could have gone the other way and probably would have if the team hadn't suffered so many significant injuries, including those to wide receivers **Yatil Green** and **Fred Barnett**, guard **Keith Sims** and defensive end **Daniel Stubbs**. Overall, the season was a huge triumph when the injuries are taken into account. ... The running game regressed from 1996. Part of that was that the coaches didn't work on it hard enough. The other problem was the offensive

### GRADING OUT 1997 season

#### OFFENSE C+

Dan Marino is still top-notch, but the running game and line need a lot of work.

#### DEFENSE B

With one big addition (or improvement from within), this could be a great unit.

#### STRATEGY B+

The coaches took a few risks but generally played things close to the vest.

line simply isn't there yet and will require significant change. ... The '97 draft proved to be a big success even though first-round pick Green was injured in July and didn't play. Second-rounder Sam Madison became a starter at corner, as did third-round picks Jason Taylor (end) and Derrick Rodgers (linebacker). All three have outstanding potential.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** The defense is one player from being great. That player is the kind of disruptive force **Jimmy Johnson** had in Dallas in **Charles Haley** and **Leon Lett**. Tackle **Daryl Gardener** has all the physical tools, so he is one possibility. To help make that happen, the team needs to re-sign tackle **Tim Bowens**, a perfect complement to Gardener. Bowens also has the potential to become dominant. The team could use a physical left end who can stuff the run and rush. **Sean Gilbert** could be that man, if his contract demands ever return to Earth. ... The offensive line must get more physical. Center **Tim Ruddy** is set to return and left tackle **Richmond Webb** is heading into the final year of his contract. With **Dan Marino** expected back, Webb, a superb pass blocker, will be needed. The other spots are up for grabs. Left guard **Jeff Buckley** will probably start, and **Brent Smith** will get a shot at right tackle. That leaves the other guard spot, where the team could use a player with a nasty disposition. —Jason Cole

### MIAMI

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
Marino	504	291	57.7	3505	55	15	10	80.8	16
Erickson	28	13	46.4	165	27	0	1	50.4	2

RUSHING	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Abdul-Jabbar	270	859	3.2	15
Spikes	63	180	2.9	2
McPhail	16	143	8.9	1

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
McDuffie	72	895	12.4	1
Drayton	38	549	14.4	4
McPhail	31	247	8.0	1

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
Mare	33	33	26	33	111

PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Blk.
Kidd	47	2029	43.2	0

KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Spikes	24	565	23.5	0

PUNT RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Jordan	26	273	10.5	0

SACKS:	Bowens 5.0, Taylor 5.0, Rodgers 5.0,
INTERCEPTIONS:	Buckley 3, Teague 2, Wooden 2.

# Jets

9-7 / 3rd

## Settling QB position tops the offseason agenda



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** It will be remembered as one of the greatest turnarounds in modern NFL history. **Bill Parcells**, who inherited a 1-15 club, rode into town on his

white horse, expunged the losing attitude and led the team to its first winning season since 1988. He instilled discipline and instituted a rigorous conditioning program. The team didn't have an explosive offense or an overpowering defense. The most consistent area was special teams, which allowed the club to win the field-position battle. Quarterback **Neil O'Donnell**, unnerved by the midseason controversy with **Glenn Foley**, became an albatross. **Adrian Murrell**, undermined by erratic blocking, usually had nowhere to run in the second half of the season and didn't crack the 1,000-yard mark until the

### GRADING OUT 1997 season

#### OFFENSE C+

Stopped scoring TDs around Halloween. Running game was absolutely dreadful.

#### DEFENSE B

A masterful job by Belichick, squeezing plenty of production out of marginal talent.

#### STRATEGY A

Parcells made all the right moves. Wonder if Robert Kraft is kicking himself.

15th game. Wide receiver **Keyshawn Johnson** finished strongly, showing why he was the top overall draft pick in 1996. The defense was hurt by a weak pass rush—end **Hugh Douglas** struggled in the 3-4 alignment—but improved dramatically overall under coordinator **Bill Belichick** and allowed about 10

fewer points per game than last season.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** The No. 1 priority is settling the quarterback issue. Parcells has lost faith in O'Donnell, but it won't be easy to make a change because of O'Donnell's big-money contract and Foley's lack of durability. The Jets would take a huge salary-cap hit by unloading O'Donnell, but they have to do it. The fiery Foley is a capable starter, but he is undersized (6-2, 210) and must hit the weights and build up his body. The team needs a right offensive tackle to replace injury-prone **David Williams**, who may retire; a center to replace **Roger Duffy**, who probably won't be re-signed; and an experienced left tackle in case **Jumbo Elliott** isn't 100 percent after Achilles' tendon surgery. Defensively, it needs a big presence at tackle. If the team can sign a big-ticket, free-agent tackle (**Dana Stubblefield**?), it will return to the 4-3. It also could use another pass-rushing end, a free safety to replace **Jerome Henderson** and a cornerback to step in for the inconsistent **Otis Smith**. —Rich Cimini

### NEW YORK

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
O'Donnell	460	259	56.3	2796	70	17	7	80.3	45
Foley	97	56	57.7	705	35t	3	1	86.5	3

RUSHING	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Murrell	300	1086	3.6	7
L. Johnson	48	158	3.3	2
Anderson	21	70	3.3	0

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
K. Johnson	70	963	13.8	5
Chreibet	58	799	13.8	3
Graham	42	542	12.9	2

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
Hall	36	36	28	41	120

PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Blk.
Hansen	71	3068	43.2	1

KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Glenn	28	741	26.5	1

PUNT RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
L. Johnson	51	619	12.1	1

SACKS:	Lewis 8.0, Ferguson 4.5, Douglas 4.0,
INTERCEPTIONS:	Smith 6, Mickens 4, Green 3.

# Patriots

9-6 / T 1st

## Defense overshadows disappointing offense



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** With no **Bill Parcells** for the entire season, no **Terry Glenn** for most of the season and no **Curtis Martin** down the stretch, the Patriots were missing some key ingredi-

ents from their 1996 team. When you also consider the team's first-place schedule (as opposed to the fourth-place schedule it played in '96), you have good reasons for the offensive struggles after an opening burst. Even when Martin was healthy, and with a revamped offensive line that was overhauled to develop a more physical presence up front, the running game failed to generate any reliable power. Overall, the offense wasn't the driving force of the team despite the presence of five 1996 Pro Bowl players (**Drew Bledsoe**, **Martin**, **Bruce Armstrong**, **Ben Coates** and **David Meggett**). The strength of this team from

### GRADING OUT 1997 season

#### OFFENSE C

For a team with "all that talent" it was hard to establish offensive cohesiveness.

#### DEFENSE B

This unit was responsible for the team's success, particularly in the final few games.

#### STRATEGY C-

Offense never established personality, and defense lacked consistency.

the start was the defense. Led by **Ted Johnson**, the run defense was at its best down the stretch. And once cornerback **Jimmy Hitchcock** regained his early-season form, the Patriots had a balanced coverage scheme with Pro Bowl cornerback **Ty Law** on the other side. The pass rush was much more aggressive and ef-

fective, registering 42 sacks in the first 15 games.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** The fragile physical condition of Glenn, the inconsistency of **Shawn Jefferson** and the diminishing contributions of **Vincent Brisby** makes wide receiver an unexpected area of concern in the offseason. Bledsoe, who is still the focal point of this team, needs more consistent receivers. On the offensive line, second-year man **Heath Irwin** and rookies **Damon Denson**, **Ed Ellis** and **Scott Rehberg** will be given a legitimate chance to supplant **Max Lane** and **Todd Rucci** in the lineup. ... Defensively, the team needs to find another big interior lineman who has the speed to rush the quarterback and the size to stand up to the running game. **Henry Thomas** struggled at times in running situations, but he was an effective free-agent pickup. The biggest need is for a linebacker to fill the middle in the nickel. **Ted Johnson** is a terrific run stuffer, but neither he nor **Todd Collins** was effective in pass coverage. —Kevin Mannix

### NEW ENGLAND

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
Bledsoe	496	296	59.7	3533	76	28	14	88.6	28
Zolak	9	6	66.7	67	20t	2	0	128.2	0

RUSHING	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Martin	274	1160	4.2	4
Grier	32	73	2.3	0
Cullors	12	72	6.0	0

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Coates	62	709	11.4	8
Jefferson	47	765	16.3	2
Brown	41	607	14.8	6
Martin	41	296	7.2	1

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
Vinateri	38	38	25	29	113

PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Blk.
Tupa	71	3243	45.7	1

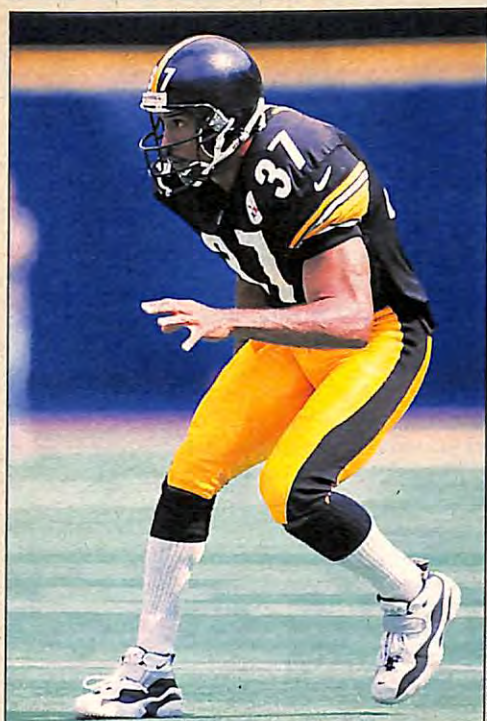
KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Meggett	33	816	24.7	0

PUNT RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Meggett	41	447	10.9	0

SACKS:	Slade 9.0, Thomas 7.0, Jones 4.0, Wheeler 4.0, Bruschi 4.0,
INTERCEPTIONS:	Clay 6, Law 3, Moore 2, Whigham 2, Hitchcock 2.

# AFC Central

Teams are listed alphabetically by nickname



**MR. VERSATILITY:** Lake did a little bit of everything for the Steelers' defense.

## The envelope, please ...

**Best coaching job:** The players keep changing in Pittsburgh, but Bill Cowher keeps getting the same results. This year, he even lost his defensive coordinator (Dick LeBeau), but it didn't show on the field.

**Best front-office job:** In 1996 the Jaguars proved they had frontline talent. In '97 they proved they had depth as well. When injuries hit, players such as Rob Johnson, Renaldo Wynn, Seth Payne, Brian DeMarco and Joel Smeenge all contributed.

**Best player, offense:** Steelers running back Jerome Bettis is good, but he doesn't dominate like Jaguars left tackle Tony Boselli does. Boselli is the best blocker in the game.

**Best player, defense:** Carnell Lake has done it all this year, blitzing, covering and playing two positions. He gives the Steelers unmatched flexibility on defense.

**Best player, special teams:** Little Jermaine Lewis stands tall on punt returns for the Ravens. He can fly and make people miss.

**Best rookie:** Ravens defensive end Peter Boulware is proving that pass rushing isn't a skill that takes years to acquire. He's a natural and has the numbers to prove it.

**Best personnel move:** It may have been dumb luck to a degree, because nobody believed Boomer Esiason would save the Bengals franchise. But you have to hand it to the Cincinnati front office for bringing back a quarterback a lot of teams thought was washed up and potentially divisive.

**Worst personnel move:** The Bengals stand out here, too. They should have been playing rookie running back Corey Dillon a lot sooner. Hurt or healthy, Ki-Jana Carter hasn't shown he can run like Dillon. —Dan Pompei

## Bengals

7-9 / 4th

### Dillon, Esiason sparked the team's fast finish



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** The emergence of rookie tailback **Corey Dillon** and resurgence of quarterback **Boomer Esiason** helped turn a disastrous season into a mediocre one. Dillon became the team's first 1,000-yard rusher since 1992 and the steal of the NFL draft. Esiason, 36, proved he has plenty of life remaining in his left arm. He started the final five games in place of a struggling **Jeff Blake** and the team responded with renewed enthusiasm. Esiason's 14 years of NFL experience, knowledge of the offense and superior leadership skills helped the Bengals erupt for points and yardage they never dreamed of during their 1-7 start. He spread the ball around with laser accuracy and got everyone involved. ... Although the offense jelled, the new 3-4 zone-blitz defense never

#### GRADING OUT 1997 season

**OFFENSE B**  
The one-two punch of Esiason and Dillon resurrected a lifeless offense.

**DEFENSE D**  
The linebackers didn't show enough speed to pull off the zone-blitz.

**STRATEGY C**  
Coaching staff needs to accelerate its teaching to avoid a slow start.

battled a foot injury and an alcohol-related arrest.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** The team is desperate for a lineman, a swift linebacker or two and a right cornerback. They'll scour the free-agent market and address those needs in the draft. ... On offense, everything hinges on whether Esiason returns. Management wants to anoint him as the '98 starter, but Esiason will weigh his options between coming back or accepting a lucrative broadcasting deal from a major TV network before making a final decision. ... The Bengals want to add at least one offensive lineman a year. A left tackle—coupled with dominant right tackle **Willie Anderson**—would allow Dillon to run all day and take the pressure off the defense, which spent way too much time on the field the first half of the season. ... As for injury-plagued **Ki-Jana Carter**, he's staying put. The Bengals have too much invested in Carter to discard him after three seasons. —Chick Ludwig

#### CINCINNATI

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
Blake	317	184	58.0	2125	50t	8	7	77.6	39
Esiason	186	118	63.4	1478	77t	13	2	106.9	7

RUSHING	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Dillon	233	1129	4.8	10
Carter	128	464	3.6	7
Blake	45	234	5.2	3

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Scott	54	797	14.8	5
Pickens	52	695	13.4	5
McGee	34	414	12.2	6

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
Pelfrey	41	43	12	16	77

PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Blk.
Johnson	81	3471	42.9	0

KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Bieniemy	34	789	23.2	1

PUNT RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Myers	26	201	7.7	0

**SACKS:** Dixon 8.0, Wilkinson 5.0, Francis 4.0, Shade 4.0.  
**INTERCEPTIONS:** Sawyer 4, Ambrose 3, Francis 1, Orlando 1, Spencer 1.

## Jaguars

11-5 / 2nd

### Injuries stunted growth on both sides of the ball



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** The team lost three defensive tackles (**Don Davey**, **John Jurkovic**, **Kelvin Pritchett**) for the season, played with three quarterbacks (**Mark Brunell**, **Rob Johnson**, **Steve Matthews**) in the first three weeks and played periods without its top corner (**Aaron Beasley**), top offensive tackle (**Tony Boselli**), top pass rusher (**Tony Brackens**) and top linebacker (**Kevin Hardy**). At defensive tackle, the club was forced to start two rookies, top pick **Renaldo Wynn** and fourth-round pick **Seth Payne**, in the stretch run. But both played capably. Brackens has continued his growth and remains the team's best defensive player, but Hardy has dropped off in his second year. On offense, the running game never materialized because of injuries to **Natrone Means** and the

#### GRADING OUT 1997 season

**OFFENSE B**  
The running game stalled, but the passing game has continued to shine.

**DEFENSE C-**  
Too many injuries hurt this unit, and the secondary played soft.

**STRATEGY B**  
Tom Coughlin found ways to win, though some schemes lacked aggressiveness.

line. Receivers **Jimmy Smith** and **Keenan McCardell** had good years and are set as the team's go-to guys. Rookie tight end **Damon Jones** struggled early but was starting late in the season and will have a chance to become a big-time tight end. Brunell became a much more efficient passer, but he needs to go for the big play more often instead of merely dumping off to his backs.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** The team needs a cornerback, but there doesn't appear to be a premier cover guy available in free agency. That makes Johnson a key, because the team will dangle him as trade bait. If the Jaguars can get a high first-round pick for Johnson, they may take a top corner (Michigan's **Charles Woodson** or North Carolina's **Dre' Bly**). A defensive end (such as Florida State's **Andre Wadsworth**) also is a possibility, because **Jeff Lageman** and **Clyde Simmons** are expected to consider retirement after the season. On offense, the Jaguars will be looking for a center—**Dave Widell** may not be back, and there is uncertainty as to how severe **Michael Cheever's** back problems are. As for potential free agents, the top one will be Means. The team is expected to evaluate what to spend on him after the playoffs. If Lageman retires, then the only other free agent who needs to be re-signed is end **Joel Smeenge**, who had a solid season. —Pete Prisco

#### JACKSONVILLE

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
Brunell	435	264	60.7	3281	75	18	7	91.2	33
Johnson	28	22	78.6	344	40	2	2	111.9	6

RUSHING	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Means	244	823	3.4	9
Stewart	136	555	4.1	8
Brunell	48	257	5.4	2

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
McCardell	85	1164	13.7	5
Smith	82	1324	16.1	4
Stewart	41	336	8.2	1

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
Hollis	41	41	31	36	134

PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Blk.
Barker	66	2964	44.9	0

KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Jackson	32	653	20.4	0

PUNT RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Barlow	36	412	11.4	0

**SACKS:** Simmons 8.5, Brackens 7.0, Smeenge 6.5.  
**INTERCEPTIONS:** Figures 5, Hudson 3, Thomas 2.

# Oilers

8-8 / 3rd

## The team needs help at corner and wideout



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** The Oilers thought they would make the playoffs and have more people see them play in Memphis. It didn't happen. But the Oilers have a young core to work

with, if they step up the offseason program just a touch. Overall, quarterback **Steve McNair** had a quality first season as a starter. He made plays others couldn't, began to lead with a passion and was a dangerous weapon when forced to run or throw on the run. At times, he has missed some open receivers, especially in the face of a rush, but that has been his only downside thus far. ... The team could not overcome weaknesses at wide receiver and cornerback. There was no shortage of effort at the positions, but not enough plays were made. ... The running game, featuring **Eddie George**, proved it could control a

### GRADING OUT 1997 season

#### OFFENSE **C**

When the Oilers failed to score first, they usually didn't win.

#### DEFENSE **C**

They had no interceptions in the first six games but had 13 in the last 10.

#### STRATEGY **B-**

Defensively, they did a good job of disguising their blemishes.

game when holding the lead. The offense, however, simply could not play from behind, and the team lost four games by seven points or fewer. This is a trend, considering 16 losses over the past three seasons have been by a touchdown or less. ... Linebacker **Lonnie Marts**, the team's only significant free-agent signing last

offseason, did not rush the passer as much as expected, but some of the secondary woes prevented the team from blitzing as often as the coaches had planned.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** The team needs help in the secondary and at wideout. The Oilers also need to look for another playmaking defensive lineman. Expect the team to pursue members of the big crop of free-agent wide receivers, a list that includes **Yancey Thigpen**, **Darnay Scott** and **Johnnie Morton**. The team also will search for a cornerback in the draft—a likely target for its first pick. ... With the pass rush struggling at times when it was strictly a four-man approach, another defensive lineman could get selected even though the team has drafted six in the past three years. ... One of its biggest battles also will be convincing free agents that Memphis is a good place to play. The empty seats in the Liberty Bowl were no help, and the new stadium in Nashville won't be ready until 1999. —Jeff Legwold

### TENNESSEE

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
McNair	415	216	52.0	2665	55t	14	13	70.4	31
Davis	1	1	100.0	22	22t	1	0	158.3	0

RUSHING	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
E. George	357	1399	3.9	6
McNair	101	674	6.7	8
Thomas	67	310	4.6	3

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Wycheck	63	748	11.9	4
Davis	43	564	13.1	4
Sanders	31	498	16.1	3

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
Del Greco	32	32	27	35	113

PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk.
Roby	73	3049	41.8	0

KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Mason	26	551	21.2	0

PUNT RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Mason	13	95	7.3	0

**SACKS:** G. Walker 7.0, Holmes 7.0, Ford 5.0.

**INTERCEPTIONS:** D. Lewis 5, Robertson 5, D. Walker 2.

# Ravens

6-9-1 / 5th

## Through growing pains, defense became sharper



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** The team started 3-1, then opposing teams figured out how to attack the Ravens' defense, especially rookie outside

linebackers **Jamie Sharper** and **Peter Boulware** and second-year middle linebacker **Ray Lewis**. But the major surprise of the season was how well the defense progressed. Since the team moved to Baltimore two years ago, coordinator **Marvin Lewis'** defense has been one of the worst in the NFL. And for half of the 1997 season, the defense ranked last. But the linebackers grew up, and the line became the defense's strongest unit thanks to free-agent acquisitions **Tony Siragusa** at tackle and end **Michael McCrary**. Lewis led the league in tackles, and Boulware should be a candidate for rookie of the year. ... After putting up record numbers

### GRADING OUT 1997 season

#### OFFENSE **C**

Started out fast, but was in disarray by midseason. This unit needs a leader.

#### DEFENSE **C**

The inexperience showed early in the season, but this group has promise.

#### STRATEGY **C-**

Marchibroda should have gotten more wins out of them, but lack of depth hurt.

in 1996, the offense was a disappointment. When the defense was struggling early in the season, the offense switched from a pass-dominated to a run-first philosophy. The Ravens didn't have the personnel who could run a ball-control offense. Receivers **Michael Jackson** and **Derrick Alexander** complained about not

getting the ball, and quarterback **Vinny Testaverde** didn't show the Pro Bowl form he had in 1996.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** The team will shed \$7 million in cap money tied to former players such as **Andre Rison**, **Leroy Hoard** and **Pepper Johnson**. That means the team will enter the free-agent market and draft with a hefty checkbook. The team will have nine unrestricted free agents, but its top priorities will be to re-sign center **Wally Williams**, cornerback **Antonio Langham** and **Alexander**. The team's priority in the draft is to get a top-notch cornerback. With **Bam Morris** in legal trouble, it needs a more reliable big running back to complement the speed of promising rookie **Jay Graham** and a bona fide fullback to add some diversity. Look for the team to get a starter at left guard through free agency and add depth on the offensive and defensive lines. Entering training camp, Testaverde and **Eric Zeier** will compete for the starting quarterback position. —Mike Preston

### BALTIMORE

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
Testaverde	470	271	57.7	2971	54t	18	15	75.9	20
Zeier	116	67	57.8	958	92	7	1	101.1	17

RUSHING	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Morris	204	774	3.8	4
Byner	84	313	3.7	0
Graham	81	299	3.7	2

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Jackson	69	918	13.3	4
Alexander	65	1009	15.5	9
Green	65	601	9.2	5

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
Stover	32	32	26	34	110

PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk.
Montgomery	83	3540	42.7	0

KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
J. Lewis	41	905	22.1	0

PUNT RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
J. Lewis	28	437	15.6	2

**SACKS:** Boulware 11.5, McCrary 9.0, J. Jones 6.0.

**INTERCEPTIONS:** Moore 4, Daniel 3, Langham 3.

# Steelers

11-5 / 1st

## Stewart provides spark for resurgent offense



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** The offense was surprisingly productive, considering the team was using its third starting quarterback in three years. **Kordell Stewart**, a first-year starter, survived a

midseason slump and played his best two games in key battles against Denver and New England. He never appeared to get flustered. Stewart's biggest achievement was bringing the team back to win six games it trailed at halftime. Stewart had devastating weapons in powerful running back **Jerome Bettis** and go-to receiver **Yancey Thigpen**. ... After a slow start, the defense jelled into one of coach **Bill Cowher's** best, finishing first in the NFL against the run. Cowher went so far as to say the line, anchored by Pro Bowl nose tackle **Joel Steed**, is the best he has had in six seasons at Pittsburgh. That's

### GRADING OUT 1997 season

#### OFFENSE **B**

Good balance with RB Bettis, WR Thigpen and improving QB Stewart.

#### DEFENSE **B**

After a slow start, the unit improved weekly, especially the line and secondary.

#### STRATEGY **A**

Bill Cowher's daring decision-making set a winning tone.

because of steady improvement from defensive ends **Kevin Henry** and **Nolan Harrison** and inspired play from **Carnell Lake**, a Pro Bowl safety who switched to cornerback, and rookie corner **Chad Scott**. Overshadowed by Lake's position switch was the contribution of safety **Myron Bell**, who moved into Lake's spot

and played with controlled aggression.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** The Steelers face big decisions at linebacker and on the offensive line. Start with outside linebacker **Greg Lloyd**, who played well below his five-time Pro Bowl form before injuring his knee. Lloyd is 32 and will have a cap value of \$3.47 million—a hefty price for a fading star. If the Steelers keep Lloyd, they probably will lose left outside linebacker **Jason Gildon**, who can become an unrestricted free agent. They should release Lloyd, re-sign Gildon and watch the development of young 'backers **Steve Conley** and **Carlos Emmons**. There might be a bigger problem on an offensive line that could lose tackle **John Jackson** to free agency. Jackson earns \$1.75 million, and it's unlikely the team will fit him under the cap. The question is whether it feels comfortable using 1996 No. 1 **Jamain Stephens** or **Paul Wiggins** in his place. It's also imperative the team re-sign Thigpen, another unrestricted free agent. —Gerry Dulac

### PITTSBURGH

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
Stewart	440	236	53.6	3020	69t	21	17	75.2	20
Tomczak	24	16	66.7	185	28t	1	2	68.9	0

RUSHING	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Bettis	375	1665	4.4	7
Stewart	88	476	5.4	11
G. Jones	72	235	3.3	1

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Thigpen	79	1398	17.7	7
C. Johnson	46	568	12.3	2
Hawkins	45	555	12.3	3

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
N. Johnson	40	40	22	25	106

PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk.
Miller	64	2729	42.6	0

KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Blackwell	32	791	24.7	1

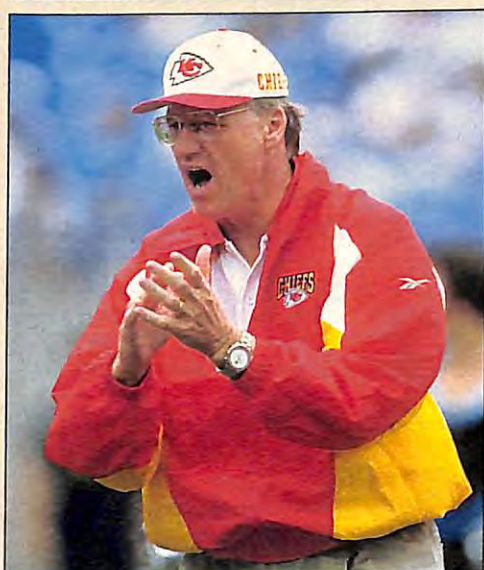
PUNT RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Blackwell	23	149	6.5	0

**SACKS:** Lake 6.0, Kirkland 5.0, Gildon 5.0.

**INTERCEPTIONS:** Woolford 4, Perry 4, Lake 3.

# AFC West

Teams are listed alphabetically by nickname



ROBERT SEALE/TSN

**DOING IT HIS WAY:** The Chiefs' great season proved that Schottenheimer's system works.

## The envelope, please ...

**Best coaching job:** Marty Schottenheimer took the Chiefs to unexpected heights with solid, consistent leadership. With players at key positions coming and going because of injuries and defections, it's clear that his system works.

**Best front-office job:** Some risky moves paid off for the Chiefs. They let Neil Smith, Dan Saleaumua, Keith Traylor and Mark Collins go and became a better team. Schottenheimer and former personnel men Lynn Stiles and Mark Hatley deserve credit for taking chances on Andre Rison, Mark McMillian and Dan Williams, and for drafting Jerome Woods, Reggie Tongue and Donnie Edwards.

**Best player, offense:** Terrell Davis has emerged as one of the premier backs in the NFL, overshadowing even the great John Elway.

**Best player, defense:** The Seahawks' Darryl Williams played free safety the way it ought to be played. An aggressive center fielder, he came up with interceptions, pass breakups and intimidating hits.

**Best player, special teams:** Darrien Gordon scored three touchdowns on punt returns for the Broncos. That is impact.

**Best rookie:** Left tackle Walter Jones improved the Seahawks' offensive line the minute he stepped on the field.

**Best personnel move:** The Seahawks signed Warren Moon as a \$975,000 backup but quickly recognized he was the best quarterback on their roster. Moon replaced injured John Friesz in the first game of the season and carried the Seahawks the rest of the way.

**Worst personnel move:** The Raiders might be excused for thinking Desmond Howard would be a better return man than he has been. But there is no excuse for thinking he could play wide receiver and for paying him an average of \$1.5 million a year. —Dan Pompei

# Broncos

12-4 / 2nd

## Defensive breakdowns mar promising season



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** The team finished with one of the best records in the league, but it entered the playoffs on a note of disappointment. The Broncos were 9-1 after 10

games, lost three of their next five and wound up losing the AFC West title to Kansas City. It wasn't the losses as much as how they transpired. The team led every game during the regular season and three of their four road losses by double figures. So, what's the problem? The offense had some shortcomings—dropped passes, missed opportunities—but overall the John Elway/Terrell Davis show played to great reviews. Defense let the team down. After adding free-agent linemen Neil Smith and Keith Traylor, the coaches thought the defense could dominate like the one Smith and Traylor left behind in Kansas City (and it did

early). But gradually it turned suspect, particularly on the road, where it allowed 204 points. The demise of Michael Dean Perry was a huge factor. Perry went to the Pro Bowl last season but was benched midway through this season and finally released. With Perry not producing and injuries hampering Maa Tanuvasa, Smith

### GRADING OUT 1997 season

#### OFFENSE **B**

Too many dropped passes, stalled drives and missed opportunities.

#### DEFENSE **C**

If only they could match Mile High intensity when they play on the road.

#### STRATEGY **B**

The record speaks for itself, but Shanahan expected to win the AFC West again.

and Alfred Williams, the line didn't produce a consistent pass rush, giving quarterbacks time to pick out receivers.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** The first order of offseason business will be to determine Elway's desire to return for a 16th season. If he retires, look for the Broncos to try to trade up to draft Peyton Manning or Ryan Leaf. If Elway returns, coach Mike Shanahan will turn his attention to free agency and landing a big-name defensive lineman. He would love to get Dana Stubblefield, but so would every other team. If Smith, who signed a one-year contract, opts for free agency, the team would receive a compensatory third-round draft pick. Even if the Broncos can't get in position for Manning or Leaf, the extra pick would give them flexibility to move up for an impact defensive player. They also need younger legs at safety, where Tyrone Braxton is 33 and Steve Atwater, 31, no longer is a Pro Bowl-caliber player. On offense, they need a tackle to replace Gary Zimmerman. —Jim Armstrong

### DENVER

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
Elway	502	280	55.8	3635	78	27	11	87.5	34
Brisler	9	6	66.7	48	15	0	0	79.9	0

RUSHING	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Davis	369	1750	4.7	15
Hebron	49	222	4.5	1
Elway	50	218	4.4	1

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Sharpe	72	1107	15.4	3
R. Smith	70	1180	16.9	12
McCaffrey	45	590	13.1	8

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
Elam	46	46	26	36	124

PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk.
Rouen	60	2598	43.3	0

KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Hebron	43	1009	23.5	0

PUNT RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Gordon	40	543	13.6	3

SACKS:	N. Smith 8.5, Williams 8.5, Tanuvasa 8.5
INTERCEPTIONS:	Braxton 4, Crockett 4, Gordon 4.

# Chargers

4-12 / T 4th

## Don't blame everything on injury problems



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** The trouble started in camp when defensive tackle Reuben Davis went down with an Achilles' tendon injury. Davis wouldn't be lonely on the injured reserve list as 13

players would join him. The biggest blow came when Stan Humphries suffered his second concussion, on November 2, and didn't play again in '97. Jim Everett finally succumbed to an elbow ailment, and the team was forced to start Craig Whelihan, its No. 3 quarterback—a recipe for disaster. But one unit that avoided the injury bug aided in the team's downfall—the offensive line. The offense was among the league's most inept because, simply, these guys couldn't block. Coach Kevin Gilbride came in with a reputation as an offensive wizard, but his system consistently blew up as the line fell far short—especially in pass

### GRADING OUT 1997 season

#### OFFENSE **D**

Didn't click even when Humphries and Everett were healthy.

#### DEFENSE **C**

The pass rush was too soft to capitalize on having a stingy run defense.

#### STRATEGY **D**

Gilbride too insistent on establishing a passing game, managed the clock poorly.

protection. Gilbride deserves his share of blame, too. He constantly fell back on the excuse his system was tough to learn, but the team failed to show much improvement. Gilbride couldn't figure how to get dangerous Eric Metcalf involved until the second half. Isn't good coaching about making adjustments?

**LOOKING AHEAD:** All available quarterbacks, contact G.M. Bobby Beathard. The team's needs are many, but quarterback is the most crucial. Humphries won't make a decision on his return until next month, but few expect him to return. With the third pick of the draft, the team may have a shot at Peyton Manning or Ryan Leaf. Or, the team could trade for a veteran QB; Jaguars backup Rob Johnson might be a nice fit because he knows Gilbride's scheme. Center Raleigh McKenzie's job is safe, but few others on the line should feel secure. Gilbride shuffled players on the right side, and left guard Joe Cocozzo and left tackle Vaughn Parker also could be replaced. If the team obtains a veteran quarterback, it could use the top pick on a much-needed pass rusher. It's imperative the team find someone to harass passers or what could be a dynamite defense will continue to ask Junior Seau to be a one-man savior. The defense also may need help in the middle. —Jay Paris

### SAN DIEGO

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
Humphries	225	121	53.8	1498	72t	5	6	70.8	18
Whelihan	238	118	49.6	1357	61t	6	10	58.1	21

RUSHING	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Brown	253	945	3.7	4
Fletcher	51	161	3.2	0
Bynum	30	97	3.2	0

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Martin	63	904	14.3	6
Metcalf	40	576	14.4	2
Fletcher	39	292	7.5	0

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
G. Davis	21	22	19	24	78

PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk.
Bennett	89	3972	44.6	1

KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Bynum	38	814	21.4	0

PUNT RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Metcalf	45	489	10.9	3

SACKS:	Seau 7.0, Harrison 4.0, Parrella 3.5
INTERCEPTIONS:	Seau 2, Harper 2, Jackson 2, Harrison 2, Bradford 2.

# Home for the holidays

This year's playoffs mark the first time since the 1987 season that neither the Bills nor the Cowboys will play in the postseason. Here's how the two teams stacked up in the Big D/No Huddle era (1988-96):

## Chiefs

13-3 / 1st

### Defense, Gannon kept playoff drive alive



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** Peripatetic wide receiver **Andre Rison** spun a sturdy web at Arrowhead Stadium. Quarterbacks **Elvis Grbac** and **Rich Gannon**—during a six-week stretch when Grbac

was hurt—engineered the West Coast offense with efficiency. But a defense that broke a 63-year-old NFL record for most consecutive games without allowing a touchdown in the second half was the linchpin that kept the team on a

drive to the playoffs. Four second-year players—lineman **John Browning**, linebacker **Donnie Edwards** and defensive backs **Reggie Tongue** and **Jerome Woods**—not only started but made big plays consistently. Gannon, who had been a backup for most of his career, replaced Grbac (broken collarbone) and kept

the offense on track for much of the second half of the season. And the committee of **Marcus Allen**, **Greg Hill**, **Donnell Bennett** and **Kimble Anders** fueled a competent, if not dominating, running attack.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** Paul Hackett and his passion for the West Coast offense will be tough to replace, and coach **Marty Schottenheimer** hopes that will be the only hole. Defensive coordinator **Gunther Cunningham** practically willed this dominating defense into fruition, but his guru status makes him a great head coaching candidate. On the roster, wide receiver **Lake Dawson** is at the end of his contract and cornerback **James Hasty** is likely to be an unrestricted free agent at the end of the season. Hasty came in late because of contract concerns but had a superb season. Allen is thinking about coming back for a 17th season. What he does will affect how the team deals with Hill. There's also the question of what to do with nose tackle **Joe Phillips** in light of **Tom Barndt's** emergence. —Luciana Chavez

#### KANSAS CITY

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
Grbac	314	179	57.0	1943	55t	11	6	79.1	19
Gannon	175	98	56.0	1144	47	7	4	79.8	13

RUSHING	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Hill	157	550	3.5	0
Allen	124	505	4.1	11
Anders	79	397	5.0	0

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Rison	72	1092	15.2	7
Anders	59	453	7.7	2
Popson	35	320	9.1	2

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
Stoyanovich	35	36	26	27	113

PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk.
Aguiar	81	3433	42.4	0

KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Vanover	50	1283	25.7	1

PUNT RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Vanover	35	383	10.9	1

SACKS:	Williams 10.5, Thomas 9.5, Booker 4.0, Browning 4.0.
INTERCEPTIONS:	McMillian 8, Woods 4, Hasty 3.

## Raiders

4-12 / T 4th

### Poor defense sets tone for a dreadful season



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** The team's big weakness was pinpointed early when Oilers running back **Eddie George** broke tackles with ease in the season opener. That set the pattern of poor tackling

and defensive breakdowns that haunted the team all season. The Raiders were dreadful defensively from start to finish. They seldom stopped the run and put little pressure on quarterbacks. The line, featuring **Chester**

#### GRADING OUT 1997 season

##### OFFENSE C+

George was unstoppable in the first half; his protection broke down in the second.

##### DEFENSE F

The Raiders offered little resistance, game after exasperating game.

##### STRATEGY D

They never made defensive progress and couldn't answer late-season questions.

**McGlockton** and **Russell Maryland**, was soft and the linebackers and defensive backs rarely caused havoc; the team lacked the quickness to make big plays. The offense, led by quarterback **Jeff George**, was explosive. But George was at the mercy of sagging pass protection. When teams began blitzing with a fury, George

and the passing game were in trouble.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** This promises to be another active offseason in Raiderland. The team needs to maneuver around its salary-cap constraints and pump life into the defense. McGlockton can become an unrestricted free agent and will command a huge salary. The Raiders should let him leave and move **Darrell Russell** to his natural tackle position. The team should then target Heisman winner **Charles Woodson** with the fourth pick in the draft to replace cornerback **Albert Lewis**, who might retire, or former Pro Bowl corner **Terry McDaniel**, who played poorly. After all, **Larry Brown** wasn't the answer. The Raiders also must improve the speed in their linebacking corps. On offense, the need for more mobile pass blockers is painfully apparent. And **Napoleon Kaufman** could use a bruising fullback to clear running lanes. But, most important, owner **Al Davis** should hire an established coach and let him install his own system. Davis' *The Raider Way* obviously is not working. —Ron Kroichick

#### OAKLAND

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
George	521	290	55.7	3917	76	29	9	91.2	58
Klingler	7	4	57.1	27	8	0	1	26.2	0

RUSHING	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Kaufman	272	1294	4.8	6
Hall	23	120	5.2	0
Williams	18	70	3.9	3

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
T. Brown	104	1408	13.5	5
Dudley	48	787	16.4	7
Jett	46	804	17.5	12

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
Ford	33	35	13	22	72

PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk.
Araguz	93	4189	45.0	0

KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Howard	61	1318	21.6	0

PUNT RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Howard	27	210	7.8	0

SACKS:	Smith 6.5, Maryland 4.5, McGlockton 4.5.
INTERCEPTIONS:	Washington 2, Turner 2, Lynch 2, Trapp 2.

## Bills

Head coaches	1 (M. Levy)
QB's starting playoff games	2 (J. Kelly, F. Reich)
Super Bowls/Super Bowl wins	4/0
Playoff record	11-8
Reg.-season division/conference records	51-21/72-36

## Cowboys

Head coaches	3 (T. Landry, J. Johnson, B. Switzer)
QB's starting playoff games	2 (T. Aikman, S. Beuerlein)
Super Bowls/Super Bowl wins	3/3
Playoff record	12-3
Reg.-season division/conference records	40-32/62-51

## Seahawks

8-8 / 3rd

### Hiring a G.M. will add long-term direction



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** John Friesz broke his right thumb in the season opener and was replaced by **Warren Moon**. By the third game, coach **Dennis Erickson** wisely shifted to a

pass-first, run-second offense that had Moon throwing 40-45 times a game. The team jumped to the top of the league in offense, and receivers **Mike Pritchard** and **Joey Galloway** developed into effective threats. But the right side of the line

(guard **Derrick Graham** and tackle **Howard Ballard**) was lost to injuries in the second half of the season, and Moon, 41, took too much of a pounding. The defense showed more speed and aggressiveness, though it switched to a basic zone scheme that rarely used the blitz after allowing 76 points in the first two games.

The downfall was the special teams, which allowed 78 points during a seven-week span in the second half of the season.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** Owner Paul Allen wants a restructured office in which the coach answers to a general manager who gives the franchise a long-term direction. The process of hiring a G.M. means Erickson will have to wait until mid-January or later to find out if he is going to be asked to come back as coach. The team would like to re-sign halfback **Lamar Smith**, defensive end **Matt LaBounty**, center **Kevin Mawae** and either tight end **Carlester Crumpler** or **Christian Fauria**. The team would like to bring back Moon, who would buy it time to develop **Jon Kitna** properly as its quarterback of the future. If it is successful in re-signing Smith, the team may have to trade, cut or reduce the salary of **Chris Warren**, who led the team in rushing but has a \$4.1 million cap number next season. A right guard and an outside linebacker are on the team's shopping list. —John Clayton

#### SEATTLE

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
Moon	528	313	59.3	3678	60t	25	16	83.7	30
Kitna	45	31	68.9	371	61	1	2	82.7	2

RUSHING	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Warren	200	847	4.2	4
Broussard	70	418	6.0	5
Smith	91	392	4.3	2

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Galloway	72	1049	14.6	12
Pritchard	64	843	13.2	2
Warren	45	257	5.7	0

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
Peterson	37	37	22	28	103

PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk.
Stark	20	813	40.7	0

KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Broussard	50	1076	21.5	0

PUNT RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Harris	21	144	6.9	0

SACKS:	Sinclair 12.0, Adams 7.0, C. Brown 6.5.
INTERCEPTIONS:	D. Williams 8, W. Williams 1, Bellamy 1, Springs 1.

# NFC East

Teams are listed alphabetically by nickname



ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

ON HIS OWN: Moore's 1997 numbers defy logic.

## The envelope, please ...

**Best coaching job:** First-year Giants coach Jim Fassel turned a last-place team into a first-place team, and he did it with one of football's worst offenses and a no-name defense. Going undefeated in the division—even in the NFC East—was quite a feat.

**Best front-office job:** Everyone thought Giants G.M. George Young was nuts for not playing the free-agent game. Instead, he kept his best players from becoming free agents and drafted well. He also hired the right coach.

**Best player, offense:** To average 16.3 yards per catch and lead the NFL in receiving yards while dealing with the restraints of Arizona's offense was a remarkable feat for wide receiver Rob Moore. How many yards might he have had if Brett Favre were throwing to him, or if Barry Sanders were in the backfield?

**Best player, defense:** The rise of the Giants coincided with the rise of outside linebacker Jessie Armstead, and it wasn't by accident.

**Best player, special teams:** Deion Sanders didn't have the best numbers, but he inspired more fear than any punt returner in the league.

**Best rookie:** Redskins weakside linebacker Derek Smith made a solid contribution and has the capacity to improve if he gets stronger.

**Best personnel move:** The Redskins signed Cris Dishman and paired him with Darrell Green to form the best cornerback tandem in the NFL.

**Worst personnel move:** The Eagles chose Chris Boniol to be their kicker over incumbent Gary Anderson. All Anderson did was hit 79 percent of his field goals with his new team, the 49ers; Boniol hit 71 percent of his. —Dan Pompei

# Cardinals

4-12 / 5th

## Plummer is this year's only real bright spot



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** Coach Vince Tobin is fortunate he has three years remaining on his contract—his saving grace after a season that ranks as one of the franchise's biggest

disappointments. The one bright spot was rookie **Jake Plummer**, who appears to be the club's first star-quality quarterback since **Neil Lomax**. ... Fullback **Larry Centers** wonders why the club resigned him. After catching 200 passes the previous two years, he was made a \$7 million blocking back. The biggest deficiency offensively was the league-worst running game. Running back **Leeland McElroy** routinely seemed confused and lost. The line was ineffective, a problem that intensified when players were rotated frequently in the closing weeks. That put undo pressure on Plummer, whose sacks quickly mounted to a

### GRADING OUT 1997 season

**OFFENSE D-**  
Never seemed organized, and play-calling was shaky, particularly on the goal line.

**DEFENSE C-**  
Went belly-up in second half of the season. It couldn't stop the run.

**STRATEGY D**  
Exotic defensive game plans disappeared late in season. Offense never was creative.

league high. But when Plummer had time to throw, he was deadly, connecting with **Rob Moore**, who became the league leader in receiving yards and earned a Pro Bowl invitation. Also disappointing was the second-half collapse of the defense, especially end **Simeon Rice**. One breakthrough was made, however.

Defensive tackle **Mark Smith** was selected to the all-rookie team.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** The biggest need is at running back, followed closely by the offensive line and safety. The club will have the second pick in the draft, so it could trade down and still land a high-quality running back. More than likely, the club will be addressing the line via free agency. Left tackle **Lomas Brown** is aging, and right guard **Anthony Redmon** should be replaced. **Matt Joyce**, **Aaron Graham** and **James Dexter** all have fewer than three years experience and could be groomed for the future if some competent veteran help is added around them. The club also has decisions to make at linebacker. Middle man **Eric Hill** will become a free agent, opening a spot for second-year linebacker **Ron McKinnon**, who filled in well while Hill was hurt. If Hill leaves, McKinnon could move to the middle, which means the club would need to look for a starting outside linebacker and a backup middle linebacker. —Lee Shappell

### ARIZONA

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
Plummer	297	157	52.9	2203	701	15	15	72.8	52
K. Graham	250	130	52.0	1408	47	4	5	65.9	16

RUSHING	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
McElroy	135	424	3.1	2
Centers	101	276	2.7	1
Plummer	39	216	5.5	2

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
R. Moore	97	1584	16.3	8
Sanders	75	1017	13.6	4
Centers	54	409	7.6	1

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
Nedney	19	19	11	17	52

PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Blk.
Feagles	91	4040	44.4	1

KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
K. Williams	59	1458	24.7	0

PUNT RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
K. Williams	40	462	11.6	0

SACKS	Swann	7.5	M. Smith	6.0	Miller	5.5
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INTERCEPTIONS	A. Williams	6	McKinnon	3	Caldwell	1	Wilson	1	McCleskey	1
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# Cowboys

6-10 / 4th

## No offense, but fall from grace was a team effort



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** This underachieving team did a free fall from the high of five straight division titles and three Super Bowl titles in five years to a losing record. The

roster—especially the core talent—should have been a lot better. Everything unraveled during and after an October 13 Monday night loss to Washington. The Cowboys never responded again to coach **Barry Switzer**, and the team remained in playoff contention only because of special teams and a defense anchored by one of the league's best secondaries. The biggest problem was a once-proud offense that failed to produce yards or points. Franchise back **Emmitt Smith** barely reached the 1,000-yard barrier and rushing touchdowns were at a premium. The line was unable to provide running lanes or

### GRADING OUT 1997 season

**OFFENSE D**  
Too few touchdowns sentenced this team to first losing record since 1990.

**DEFENSE B**  
Weight of carrying the team finally cracked this unit's backbone.

**STRATEGY D**  
Defense covered coaching deficiencies until the season's final month.

protection for **Troy Aikman**, especially against blitzing teams. The injury to tackle **Mark Tuinei** and bad years by guard **Nate Newton** and tackle **Erik Williams** contributed to the woes. On the bright side, free-agent kicker **Richie Cunningham**, third-round linebacker **Dexter Coakley** and first-round tight end

**David LaFleur** made successful Dallas debuts.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** First, the team needs new direction, a coach who will command player respect while insisting on a more disciplined approach. Second, the roster needs attention, starting with a pass-rushing defensive end and an offensive line that needs repair. The defensive end could come from the eighth pick in the draft or free agency. Either way, lack of a pass rush from the front four must be addressed. ... The first order of business on the offensive line might be to move **Larry Allen** to left tackle—assuming he is re-signed. The next will be to inspire Williams to play better on the right side and find help at the guard positions. Newton could be an offseason casualty. ... Smith's inconsistencies and injuries must be addressed. The Cowboys, like most teams, are most successful when Smith is running effectively, creating options for Aikman and opening the field for wide receiver **Michael Irvin** and the tight end. —Mickey Spagnola

### DALLAS

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
Aikman	518	292	56.4	3283	641	19	12	78.0	33
Wilson	21	12	57.1	115	32	0	0	72.5	4

RUSHING	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
E. Smith	261	1074	4.1	4
S. Williams	121	468	3.9	2
Aikman	25	79	3.2	0

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Irvin	75	1180	15.7	9
Bjornson	47	442	9.4	0
Miller	46	645	14.0	4

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
Cunningham	24	24	34	37	126

PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Blk.
Gowin	86	3592	41.8	0

KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Walker	50	1167	23.3	0

PUNT RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Sanders	33	407	12.3	1

**INTERCEPTIONS:** Sanders 2, Stoutmire 2, K. Smith 1, Woodson 1, Coakley 1.

# Eagles

6-9-1 / 3rd

## Preparation for 1997 season grades out at 'F'



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** The worst season in the Ray Rhodes era can be traced to an offseason in which the team failed miserably in the draft and in free agency. Rhodes wanted three impact players from the draft and didn't get any. Defensive end **Jon Harris**, the first-round pick, contributed nothing. This was Rhodes' "sleeper" pick. Wide receiver **Rae Carruth**, taken two picks after Harris, should have been the choice. Second-rounder **James Darling** was moved from middle linebacker to outside and played only because **Darrin Smith** was injured. Running back **Duce Staley**, the third pick, had just one carry through the team's first 15 games. Six of the team's final eight picks were not on the roster by season's end. That's impact? The moves in free agency may have been worse.

### GRADING OUT 1997 season

#### OFFENSE C

Bobby Hoying answered the need at quarterback, but that's it.

#### DEFENSE C+

The lack of big plays hurt all year—and the run-stopping vanished.

#### STRATEGY F

The offseason was a joke from the draft through training camp.

Center **Steve Everitt** (\$11.4 million) wasn't as good as **Raleigh McKenzie**, the man he replaced. Everitt may have been the free-agent bust of the offseason. Then again there was Smith, the former Cowboy, who made \$100,000 per tackle—13 for \$1.3 million. And kicker **Chris Boniol** missed more field-goal

attempts (nine), than he did the past two years as a Cowboy (five). And don't forget guard **Mike Zandofsky**, who started the opener and was cut by midseason.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** Before the Eagles watch a tape of a college player—or visit with a free agent—they must hire a general manager. Once that's done, the team needs again to upgrade its offensive and defensive lines, add a speed receiver and maybe a running back. A veteran left tackle through free agency (**Todd Steussie**? **Bruce Armstrong**? **John Jackson**?) would allow the team to move 1996 first-rounder **Jermame Mayberry** inside to left guard. Defensively, there are several prime-time linemen available—**Dana Stubblefield**, **Chester McGlockton**, **John Randle**, **Eric Swann**—and the Eagles need at least one. Running back **Ricky Watters** is all but gone as a free agent, and if **Charlie Garner** follows him, that would leave Staley at running back and force the team to think about a veteran, or a high pick in that area. —Mark Eckel

### PHILADELPHIA

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
Hoying	225	128	56.9	1573	721	11	6	83.8	28
Detmer	244	134	54.9	1567	57	7	6	73.9	19

RUSHING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Watters	285	1110	3.9	7
Garner	116	547	4.7	3
Turner	18	96	5.3	0

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Fryar	86	1316	15.3	6
Turner	48	443	9.2	3
Watters	48	440	9.2	0

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
Boniol	33	33	22	31	99

PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk.
Hutton	87	3660	42.1	1

KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Staley	47	1139	24.2	0

PUNT RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Solomon	10	55	5.5	0

**SACKS:** Hall 8.5, W. Thomas 5.0, Dent 4.5.  
**INTERCEPTIONS:** Vincent 3, Dawkins 3, Dimry 2, W. Thomas 2.

# Giants

10-5-1 / 1st

## Rising defensive stars keyed team's ascent



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** The keys to the team's success were the winning attitude first-year coach **Jim Fassel** instilled and the maturation of a young defense that ranked among the leaders in takeaways. Fassel arrived with a label of quarterback guru but showed he could run an entire team. He squeezed just enough out of an unimposing offense, asking it simply to make an occasional play and not lose games for the defense. Other than fullback **Charles Way**, the stars were on defense. The unit began the season as a bunch of no-names and finished with two Pro Bowl starters (linebacker **Jessie Armstead**, end **Michael Strahan**) and three NFC defensive players of the week in a five-week span down the stretch. The most pleasant surprise was the offensive line, in general, and

### GRADING OUT 1997 season

#### OFFENSE C

A conservative approach eked out just enough big plays to win.

#### DEFENSE A

Stopping the run and forcing turnovers were keys for one of NFL's best young units.

#### STRATEGY A

Fassel showed adaptability; defensive coordinator John Fox is a rising star.

left tackle **Roman Oben**, in particular. Other than turnovers, the key statistic was the dramatic improvement in sacks for and against. Injuries crippled the promising rookie class, notably first-round pick **Ike Hilliard**. Quarterback **Danny Kanell** led the march to the top after replacing **Dave Brown**. His statistics were

unimpressive, but he showed a knack for making big, timely plays.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** Other than trying to re-sign safety **Tito Wooten**, the team won't have to tinker much with the defense. End **Chad Bratzke** must bounce back from a serious leg injury; if he does, the line likely will remain intact. There are questions almost everywhere on offense other than at fullback. Kanell showed enough to merit cautious optimism as the quarterback of the immediate future but has a long way to go before proving he can lead a championship contender. Tailback **Rodney Hampton**'s contract will make it almost impossible to keep him, **Tyrone Wheatley** hasn't proved himself over the long haul and **Tiki Barber** might not be durable enough to be the every-down back. **Lance Scott** did well as an emergency fill-in at center, but with **Brian Williams** not likely to return, the team might try to upgrade there. Even if Hilliard returns to form, there is need for depth at receiver. —Neil Best

### NEW YORK

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
Kanell	294	156	53.1	1740	681	11	9	70.7	19
Brown	180	93	51.7	1023	62	5	3	71.1	13

RUSHING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Way	151	698	4.6	4
Wheatley	152	583	3.8	4
Barber	136	511	3.8	3

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Calloway	58	849	14.6	8
Way	37	304	8.2	1
Barber	34	299	8.8	1

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
Daluiso	27	29	22	32	93

PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk.
Maynard	110	4486	40.8	1

KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Pegram	22	382	17.4	0

**SACKS:** Strahan 14.0, Harris 10.0, K. Hamilton 8.0.  
**INTERCEPTIONS:** Sehorn 6, Sparks 5, Wooten 5.

# Redskins

8-7-1 / 2nd

## One long, head-banging season ends in D.C.



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** A single game, a 7-7 tie with the Giants, sums up a bizarre season. On that night, **Gus Frerotte** head-butted a concrete wall and sprained his neck, **Michael**

**Westbrook** ripped off his helmet in anger over an official's decision and **Jeff Hostetler** had a night at quarterback he'd just as soon forget. This team wasn't quite good enough to win regularly or big, nor was it quite bad enough to lose regularly. The team had a difficult time getting its offense, defense and special teams to perform solidly in the same game. When it did, it played well and beat the likes of Jacksonville and Dallas, before the Cowboys began their free fall. When it didn't, it lost to the likes of the Rams and Ravens. Part of the problem was the running game. **Terry Allen** suffered three injuries—broken thumb,

### GRADING OUT 1997 season

#### OFFENSE C

Highlights and lowlights abound. What was needed was consistency.

#### DEFENSE C+

There were problems, but defense kept team in as many games as it cost it.

#### STRATEGY C

The team faltered in the second half of the season for the second straight year.

sprained knee, sprained ankle—and with him out of the lineup, the ground game faltered. Part of the problem was the inconsistency of Frerotte. And part of the problem was the hole that was left in the middle of the defensive line when tackle **Sean Gilbert** refused to sign a contract that would have paid him between \$200,000 and

\$300,000 per game.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** The team will improve if Frerotte can elevate his performance. He has to complete more than 50 percent of his passes and make plays when the game is at stake. He's a tough guy—he played the fourth quarter against the Rams with what turned out to be a broken hip. But he probably needs to be more assertive with his teammates and coaches. On the offensive line, the team has to sign or replace left tackle **Joe Patton** and left guard **Tre Johnson**, who will be free agents. It has to decide if Allen's year was bad luck or whether he's showing the wear and tear of 895 carries the past three seasons. And if Allen isn't going to be Allen, the team has to determine if **Stephen Davis** is the back to replace him. The defensive line will have to be addressed through the draft and free agency. A power player is needed who can stop the run and collapse the pocket. A pass-rushing defensive end is needed, too. —Paul Woody

### WASHINGTON

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
Frerotte	402	204	50.7	2682	52	17	12	73.8	23
Hostetler	144	79	54.9	899	69	5	10	56.5	10

RUSHING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Allen	210	724	3.4	4
Davis	141	567	4.0	3
Mitchell	23	107	4.7	1

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Asher	49	474	9.7	1
Mitchell	36	438	12.2	1
Westbrook	34	559	16.4	3
Bowie	34	388	11.4	2

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
Blanton	34	34	16	24	82

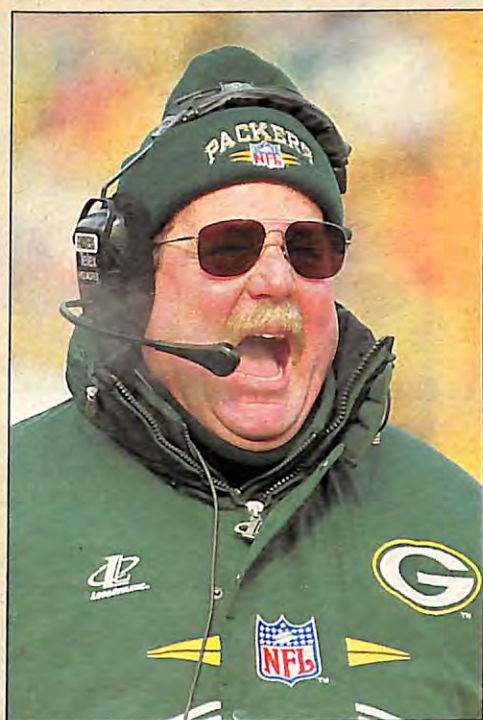
PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk.
M. Turk	84	3788	45.1	1

KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Mitchell	47	1094	23.3	1

**PUNT RETURNS** No. Yds. Avg. TD  
Mitchell 38 442 11.6 1  
**SACKS:** Harvey 9.5, M. Patton 4.5, Mims 4.0.  
**INTERCEPTIONS:** Dishman 4, Richard 4, Pounds 3.

# NFC Central

Teams are listed alphabetically by nickname



ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

**STILL ON TOP:** Holmgren has kept the Packers from succumbing to the post-Super Bowl blues.

## The envelope, please ...

**Best coaching job:** This really could be a four-way tie between Mike Holmgren, Dennis Green, Tony Dungy and Bobby Ross, but Holmgren's team is on top. Despite losing Desmond Howard, Keith Jackson, Andre Rison and Sean Jones, the Packers remain a dominant, hungry team.

**Best front-office job:** Rich McKay built the Bucs from the basement up. McKay, personnel director Jerry Angelo and director of college scouting Tim Ruskell have drafted as well as any front-office group in the league.

**Best player, offense:** Brett Favre gets the nod over Barry Sanders mostly because he can impact a game in more ways by touching the ball on every play.

**Best player, defense:** Vikings tackle John Randle was a bit streaky, but he more than made up for his off games. Nobody gets after the passer from the tackle position better.

**Best player, special teams:** Jason Hanson of the Lions combines leg strength with accuracy, making him one of the NFL's best kickers.

**Best rookie:** Bucs running back Warrick Dunn may have hit the wall in the second half, but no other rookie came close to matching what he did early in the season.

**Best personnel move:** Free safety Mark Carrier gave the Lions direction in an unstable secondary and revived his play in a new environment.

**Worst personnel move:** The Bears gave up the 11th pick in the '97 draft and a \$2.6 million bonus for Rick Mirer, who appeared to have lost all his confidence in Seattle. The Bears proved he hadn't lost all of it by helping him lose more of it. —Dan Pompei

## Bears

4-12 / 5th

### Needs of defensive line must be addressed



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** The franchise question going into the season was quarterback—and it still is. **Rick Mirer** proved to be a bust, and the juggling of him and **Erik Kramer** by the coaching staff made the situation worse. **Tyrone Hughes** was given a \$1 million signing bonus as part of a three-year, \$2.6 million deal to lift the special teams, but he was among the early inactives by season's end. The defense took an early hit when end **Alonso Spellman** went out with a shoulder injury that kept him out nine weeks, then lost **John Thierry**, the other end, at midseason with a broken leg. But the season may have been lost when **Curtis Conway**, the team's best player, broke a collarbone in an exhibition game and was not 100 percent all season. The draft proved to be no help. Tight

#### GRADING OUT 1997 season

##### OFFENSE

C-

Injuries to Conway and Harris hurt. The QB situation was bungled early.

##### DEFENSE

C+

Allowed record number of points but tightened as season progressed.

##### STRATEGY

C-

There were some questionable calls early, but coaches held team together.

end **John Allred** contributed little and **Darnell Autry** provided capable but unspectacular relief for running back **Raymont Harris**. The bright spots came via free agency. **Ricky Proehl** made the most of spotty opportunities and led the team in receiving, and end **Mark Thomas** keyed a late-season surge by the defense.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** Kramer's comeback from a career-threatening neck injury may have answered the quarterback question for next season, unless there is a deal to trade up in the draft. But the defensive line is a top priority. The team needs to do several things: re-sign unrestricted free-agent tackle **Jim Flanigan**; land either **Dana Stubblefield** or **Eric Swann** in the free-agent market to dominate the middle; trade **Spellman** to give both sides a fresh start; and use a high draft pick on an end. Middle linebacker **Bryan Cox** is all but certain to leave, but re-signing linebacker **Barry Minter**, who can play the middle or the weak side, is perhaps No. 1 on the agenda. Running back is expected to be a high priority in the draft, and depth at safety must be addressed in the wake of **Anthony Marshall's** release. Coach **Dave Wannstedt's** future is stable for at least one more year, and with **Mark Hatley** heading the personnel department, the Bears will be aggressive in offseason moves. —John Mullin

#### CHICAGO

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
Kramer	477	275	57.7	3011	78	14	14	74.0	25
Mirer	103	53	51.5	420	34	0	6	37.7	15

RUSHING	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
R. Harris	275	1033	3.8	10
Autry	112	319	2.8	1
Salaam	31	112	3.6	0

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Proehl	58	753	13.0	7
Penn	47	576	12.3	3
Wetnight	46	464	10.1	1

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
Jaeger	20	20	21	26	83

PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Blk.
Sauerbrun	95	4059	42.7	0

KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Hughes	43	1008	23.4	0

PUNT RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Hughes	36	258	7.2	0

SACKS: Minter 6.0, Flanigan 6.0, B. Cox 5.0.

INTERCEPTIONS: W. Harris 5, Tom. Carter 3, Mangum 2.

## Buccaneers

10-6 / 2nd

### Thanks to Dungy and 'D,' the streak was sacked



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** At long last, the team put to rest one of the NFL's most dubious streaks. A string of 14 consecutive losing seasons came to an end as the team clinched its first playoff berth since 1982. **Tony Dungy** showcased his coaching skills, and the team thrived because of an outstanding defense. Offensively, no player showed more improvement than quarterback **Trent Dilfer**. And **Warrick Dunn** quickly emerged as a feature back with the ability to make big plays. It didn't hurt that he had one of the league's premier fullbacks, **Mike Alstott**, as his running mate and an offensive line that may have played over its head. The team had high hopes for **Horace Copeland**, who missed 1996 with a knee injury, but he never emerged as the go-to guy for a limited receiving corps. Rookie

#### GRADING OUT 1997 season

##### OFFENSE

C+

Dilfer improved as Dunn and Alstott formed the league's best 1-2 punch.

##### DEFENSE

B+

Nickerson, Brooks and Sapp carried one of the league's fastest defenses.

##### STRATEGY

A-

Dungy knew defense wins games, but it was nice to get some help from Dilfer.

receiver **Reidel Anthony** was inconsistent and tight end **Jackie Harris** never was much of a factor. Defensively, Pro Bowl linebackers **Hardy Nickerson** and **Derrick Brooks** carried the team, and they received plenty of help from the defensive line, which got a breakthrough year from third-year tackle **Warren Sapp**.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** Dungy is not a big believer in free agency, so don't count on seeing a lot of new faces in 1998. Dungy's philosophy is to build through the draft and keep the nucleus together for the long term. Guard **Jim Pyne**, free safety **Charles Mincy** and Harris are the only players of consequence who will become free agents in the offseason. Harris almost certainly won't be back, but Mincy likely will return. The team likes Pyne but doesn't want to pay him starter's money. If Pyne doesn't return, **Frank Middleton** and **Jorge Diaz** would be the starting guards. Several areas need help, and most of it will come through the draft. A playmaking receiver is the top priority because the team has to take the pressure off the running game. Offensive line depth and tight end also are concerns. The team also would like to get a top-notch cornerback, which probably won't be available late in the first round, so the need might have to be filled through free agency. —Pat Yasinskas

#### TAMPA BAY

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
Dilfer	386	217	56.2	2555	59	21	11	82.8	32
Walsh	17	6	35.3	58	38	0	1	21.2	0

RUSHING	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Dunn	224	978	4.4	4
Alstott	176	665	3.8	7
Dilfer	33	99	3.0	1

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Dunn	39	462	11.8	3
Anthony	35	448	12.8	4
Williams	33	486	14.7	4
Copeland	33	431	13.1	1

PUNT RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Williams	46	597	13.0	1

SACKS: Ahanotu 10.0, Sapp 9.5.

INTERCEPTIONS: Abraham 5, Lynch 2, Brooks 2.

# Lions

9-7 / T 3rd

## Offense, as usual, was Barry, Barry good



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** The Lions led the league in total offense most of the season, but their impressive numbers were balanced by inconsistency. Much of the offensive success

could be traced to **Barry Sanders**, who successfully defended his status as the best running back in the game while forcing opponents to try and stop him by bringing safeties up to the line. Those who did paid by giving receivers **Herman Moore** and **Johnnie Morton** single coverage—and that translated into 1,000-yard seasons for both. Quarterback **Scott Mitchell** had an up-and-down year, but he threw for more than 3,000 yards and found ways to win down the stretch—a big development. ... Rookie cornerback **Bryant Westbrook** progressed rapidly and appears to have a Pro Bowl future.

### GRADING OUT 1997 season

#### OFFENSE **B+**

High-powered Lions struggled early in games, excelled in 2-minute offense.

#### DEFENSE **B+**

Several young starters made big jumps, and unit improved dramatically.

#### STRATEGY **B**

Ross' two-back system aided Sanders, and aggressive defense made a difference.

End **Robert Porcher** played well, as did middle linebacker **Stephen Boyd**. Free safety **Mark Carrier** was a great free-agent pickup who solidified a young secondary. But the biggest impact was provided by new coach **Bobby Ross**, whose discipline and honesty brought a refreshing change to the locker room. Ross provided

the kind of direction and heart that could lead to a Super Bowl challenge.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** The Lions have 16 roster players who will become free agents after the season, 12 of them unrestricted. The team must keep three at any cost—Pro Bowl center **Kevin Glover**, rising-star receiver **Morton** and offensive tackle **Ray Roberts**. The most interesting decisions will involve defensive tackle **Mike Wells** and offensive tackle **Larry Tharpe**. Both improved during the season, but it would be hard to justify throwing big money at either—especially Tharpe, with 1997 draft pick **Juan Roque** waiting in the wings. The only other unrestricted starter is outside linebacker **George Jamison**, who probably will be welcome to return at the right price. Three restricted free agents are important: linebacker **Boyd**, strong safety **Ron Rice** and tight end **David Sloan**. The deadline to tender offers is February 13. The team's free-agent signings probably will dictate what direction it will follow in the draft. —Steve Kornacki

### DETROIT

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
Mitchell	509	293	57.6	3484	79	19	14	79.6	41
Reich	30	11	36.7	121	27	0	2	21.7	0

RUSHING	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Sanders	335	2053	6.1	11
Rivers	29	166	5.7	1
Vardell	32	122	3.8	6

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Moore	104	1293	12.4	8
Morton	80	1057	13.2	6
Sanders	33	305	9.2	3

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
Hanson	39	40	26	29	117

PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Blk.
Jett	84	3576	42.6	2

KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Milburn	55	1315	23.9	0

PUNT RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Milburn	47	433	9.2	0

**SACKS:** Porcher 12.5, Ellis 8.5, Scroggins 7.5.  
**INTERCEPTIONS:** Carrier 5, Brown 2, Westbrook 2.

# Packers

13-3 / 1st

## A solid running game made Favre's job easier



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** The keys to another high-quality season have been a commitment to the run and the outstanding performance of **Dorsey Levens**. The run game has opened

things up for quarterback **Brett Favre**. Almost as important has been the stability rookie **Ross Verba** has provided at left tackle. Until Verba became a starter, the coaches had to provide more pass-protection help than they wanted to, limiting their options. Wide receivers **Robert Brooks** and **Antonio Freeman** have been spectacular on occasions. Defensively, the line has been a big disappointment with nose tackle **Gilbert Brown** missing two-thirds of the season because of injuries. The ends, **Reggie White** and **Gabe Wilkins**, haven't dominated. Despite the loss of starting corner **Craig Newsome**, the secondary

### GRADING OUT 1997 season

#### OFFENSE **B+**

It took until the latter third of the year for the Packers to start clicking.

#### DEFENSE **B+**

Disappointing against the run, but don't try throwing on Fritz Shurmur's crew.

#### STRATEGY **B**

Holmgren should have gone to run earlier; Shurmur stayed aggressive in stretch.

has never been more solid during the **Mike Holmgren** era. Corner **Doug Evans** has emerged as a stopper and **Tyrone Williams** has been steady. The team had a streak of 30 quarters in which it gave up one passing touchdown. Most of the pressure on opposing quarterbacks, however, has been created by blitzing linebackers and

safeties. In the playoffs, the team may need more from its line.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** The team's objective will be the same this offseason: re-sign its players. The top priority is Levens. Because they were unable to re-sign him during the season, the Packers might have to win a bidding war. Others who will be on the market are Evans, Brooks, Wilkins, guard **Aaron Taylor**, running back **Edgar Bennett** and safety **Eugene Robinson**. Wilkins and Taylor are probably gone and Evans may be, too. The team may have to use much of its cap money to keep Levens and Brooks. Regardless, G.M. **Ron Wolf** has to address the defensive line, especially if White decides to retire. The team has no young ends in backup roles and must start dealing with that problem. Don't be surprised if Wolf makes a run at free agent **Bryce Paup**, who wants to return to Green Bay. His presence would allow the team to play more 3-4 and reduce the need to address the line's depth. —Tom Silverstein

### GREEN BAY

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
Favre	513	304	59.3	3867	74	35	16	92.6	25
Bono	10	5	50.0	29	14	0	0	56.3	1

RUSHING	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Levens	329	1435	4.4	7
Favre	58	187	3.2	1
Hayden	32	148	4.6	1

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Freeman	81	1243	15.3	12
R. Brooks	60	1010	16.8	7
Levens	53	370	7.0	5

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
Longwell	48	48	24	30	120

PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Blk.
Hentrich	75	3372	45.0	0

KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Schroeder	24	562	23.4	0

**SACKS:** White 11.0, Wilkins 6.0, S. Dotson 5.5.  
**INTERCEPTIONS:** Butler 5, Prior 4, Evans 3.

# Vikings

9-7 / T 3rd

## Late-season dive sours the team's 8-2 start



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** The team began this season spouting the belief that it had assembled the strongest and deepest team in coach **Dennis Green's** six-year tenure, with the components in

place to end its nine-year postseason drought and challenge Green Bay for division supremacy. And through the first 10 games, it backed up its talk, posting an 8-2 record that was the franchise's finest since 1976. But just when the Vikings appeared poised to add one of their patented December runs to their strong start, thereby creating an upper-echelon record, a late-season tailspin slid them back toward the pack of NFL mediocrity. Season-ending injuries to key players—quarterback **Brad Johnson** and center **Jeff Christy**—played a large part in the slump. But, more relevant, the team's defense was

### GRADING OUT 1997 season

#### OFFENSE **B-**

The Vikings have great talent, but the unit was too streaky this season.

#### DEFENSE **D**

Opponents ran on the team early and threw on them all year long.

#### STRATEGY **C**

They became stagnant on offense and ineffective on defense down the stretch.

consistently rated in the league's bottom five this season. The Vikings could never really disguise the coverage problems they had in the secondary and also were hurt a lot by a lack of depth there. Even the offense, which was top-ranked in the league after six weeks, lost its rhythm by mid-November and struggled to get the ball

to its big-play weapons—wide receivers **Cris Carter** and **Jake Reed** and running back **Robert Smith**.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** The team is for sale, and some expect it to change hands by February 1. Green's coaching future appears grim in Minnesota, unless new owners arrive on the scene quickly and keep him from shopping around for other employment options. The team's current ownership, still angered by the last-chapter bombshell contained in Green's midseason autobiography, are anything but aligned in support of their embattled coach, especially given the team's late-season swoon. Many key players are watching the whole mess, trying to plan their futures around an environment that looks ripe for change. ... If they have any hopes of keeping what looks to be a young and fairly talented team together, they must begin by re-signing their four premier free agents—Reed, Smith, defensive tackle **John Randle** and left offensive tackle **Todd Steussie**. —Don Banks

### MINNESOTA

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
Johnson	452	275	60.8	3036	56	20	12	84.5	26
Cunningham	88	44	50.0	501	34	6	4	71.3	7

RUSHING	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
R. Smith	232	1266	5.5	6
Hoard	80	235	2.9	4
Evans	43	157	3.7	2

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Carter	89	1069	12.0	13
Reed	68	1138	16.7	6
R. Smith	37	197	5.3	1

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
Murray	23	24	12	17	59

PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Blk.
Berger	73	3133	42.9	0

KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Palmer	32	711	22.2	0

**SACKS:** Randle 15.5, Clemons 7.0, Rudd 5.0.  
**INTERCEPTIONS:** Washington 4, Griffith 2, Fuller 2, Thomas 2.

# NFC West

Teams are listed alphabetically by nickname



ROBERT SEALE/TSN

**SAVING GRACE:** Bates' kickoff returns often gave the Panthers' offense good field position.

## The envelope, please ...

**Best coaching job:** Most coaches wouldn't be able to prevent a team from quitting after a 1-7 start. But Dan Reeves got the Falcons to change directions, and they aren't exactly the most talented group around.

**Best front-office job:** The 49ers developed a running game at the most opportune time by signing free-agent tailback Garrison Hearst and free-agent guard Kevin Gogan. Cornerback Darnell Walker was yet another free agent who helped the 49ers win.

**Best player, offense:** Without the threat of Jerry Rice and with the threat of another concussion really messing him up, Steve Young completed 68 percent of his passes for an average gain of 8.6 yards per attempt.

**Best player, defense:** With free agency on the horizon, 49ers tackle Dana Stubblefield had a big year. He was the best player on pro football's best defense.

**Best player, special teams:** Panther Michael Bates returned kicks better than anyone in the league. Just think of where Carolina's offense would have been without him.

**Best rookie:** Fred Lane was the most unlikely person to save the Panthers' ground game, but he gave his team a surge with his nifty running in the second half of the season.

**Best personnel move:** Cutting Lawrence Phillips took some guts, but keeping him would have taken more guts. The Rams did the right thing.

**Worst personnel move:** The Rams signed free-agent fullback Craig "Ironhead" Heyward in part to serve as an example to Phillips. But Heyward reported to camp out of shape and, for the most part, wasn't of much help to Phillips or anyone else. —Dan Pompei

# Falcons

7-9 / T 2nd

## Reeves deserves credit for huge turnaround



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** Dan Reeves won't win the NFL Coach of the Year Award, but he deserves plaudits for a job well done. The most notable improvements were on defense

and special teams. The team rushed the passer as well as any team despite sending only five men most of the time. Linebacker **Cornelius Bennett** and linemen **Chuck Smith**, **Travis Hall**, **Les Archambeau** and **Dan Owens** were productive and tenacious. **Jessie Tuggle** overcame an ankle injury to make his fourth Pro Bowl. The secondary, formerly one of the worst, gained respect with free-agent acquisitions **Ray Buchanan** and **Ronnie Bradford**. The team led the league in punt coverage and ranked second in kickoff coverage going into the last game. It was fourth in kickoff returns, with **Byron Hanspard** returning two for

### GRADING OUT 1997 season

#### OFFENSE C

Line never adjusted to smash-mouth style. Chandler finished strong.

#### DEFENSE B

Great year for front four and LB Cornelius Bennett. Secondary steadily improved.

#### STRATEGY B+

Play-calling was stodgy, but the schemes were solid and the effort was exceptional.

TDs, and **Shane Dronett** blocked two field-goal attempts. The offense suffered from poor line play, and the running game Reeves envisioned never materialized. Still, **Chris Chandler** overcame an injury-plagued start to put a stranglehold on the QB job. Reeves' first draft produced three starters: tight end **O.J. Santiago**, linebacker

**Henri Crockett** and center **Calvin Collins**.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** Line coach **Art Shell** didn't coax much production out of a group that had been groomed to play in the run-and-shoot. The unit will have to rebuild for a power attack, and right tackle will be the team's No. 1 priority. The other priorities on offense are retaining top receiver **Bert Emanuel**, a potential free agent, and finding a competent No. 2 QB and a second tight end. Tight end **Ed West** ended the season on I.R. and should retire. Barring a trade, **Jamal Anderson** and **Byron Hanspard** will compete for the running back job. The defense still needs a run stuffer—it could be **Nathan Davis** if he improves—to work in at tackle. Upgrades are needed at strongside linebacker, where **David Brandon** comes off a broken leg and **Henri Crockett** played out of position, and strong safety, where **William White** was a starter. Kicker **Morten Andersen** and punter **Dan Stryzinski** are potential free agents. Andersen won't come cheap, and the team may opt to spend money on other needs. —Tony Fabrizio

### ATLANTA

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
Chandler	342	202	59.1	2692	56	20	7	95.1	39
Graziani	23	7	30.4	41	13	0	2	3.7	1

RUSHING	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Anderson	290	1002	3.5	7
Hanspard	53	335	6.3	0
Chandler	43	158	3.7	0

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Emanuel	65	991	15.2	9
Mathis	62	802	12.9	6
Green	29	360	12.4	0
Anderson	29	284	9.8	3

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
Andersen	35	35	23	27	104

PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk.
Stryzinski	89	3498	39.3	0

KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Hanspard	40	987	24.7	2

PUNT RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Kinchen	52	446	8.6	0

SACKS:	C. Smith 12.0, Hall 10.5, Archambeau 8.5,
INTERCEPTIONS:	Buchanan 5, Bradford 4, Booker 3.

# 49ers

13-3 / 1st

## Nightmarish beginning turns into dream season



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** The season started with an untested rookie head coach being tested right away as by halftime of the season opener, wide receiver **Jerry Rice** was lost with a knee

injury, and quarterback **Steve Young** was a candidate for retirement because of another concussion. But Young came back and wound up leading the league in passing. And Rice came back, too, only to fracture his kneecap and be shelved again. But in a strange season, it was Rice's touchdown catch that helped launch a comeback win over the Broncos that clinched home-field advantage for the playoffs. Without Rice, **Steve Mariucci's** offense centered on running back **Garrison Hearst**, who re-defined himself as a winner in the 49ers' system, and was the team's first 1,000-yard rusher since

### GRADING OUT 1997 season

#### OFFENSE B+

Young stayed healthy, Hearst ran wild, and they survived life without Rice.

#### DEFENSE A

When Rice went down, the defense said: 'We'll take you the rest of the way.'

#### STRATEGY A

Mariucci worked well with depleted offense and earned respect along the way.

**Ricky Watters**. In Rice's absence, receivers **Terrell Owens** and **J.J. Stokes** combined for 12 touchdown catches and started to come of age. But it was the team's veteran defense that, in essence, provided most of the team's success. Defensive tackle **Dana Stubblefield** had a dominant year, and the defense played so well

the offense had time to find itself.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** Stubblefield is a free agent, and the team doesn't think it can afford him. Reserve **Junior Bryant** is well-regarded, but the team may need a greater presence to go alongside **Bryant Young**. ... Already, the front office has to find a way to trim \$19 million from the payroll to get in line with the salary cap. That means high-priced veterans such as pass-rush specialist **Kevin Greene** and cornerback **Rod Woodson** are candidates for restructuring, pay cuts or release. ... The offensive line will see change, too. Although left tackle **Derrick Deese** has played well, he feels more natural at guard, and the team can either give **Harris Barton** a shot at tackle or try to acquire a young player. ... Linebacker **Gary Plummer** and tight end **Brent Jones** are retiring, but Jones' replacement, rookie **Greg Clark**, has shown he is ready to step in. Finding a backup for Plummer might not be as easy. **Kevin Mitchell**, a draft pick in 1994, couldn't hold the job when given a chance in '97. —Brian Murphy

### SAN FRANCISCO

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
S. Young	356	241	67.7	3029	82	19	6	104.7	35
Druckenmiller	52	21	40.4	239	33	1	4	29.2	4

RUSHING	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Hearst	234	1019	4.4	4
Kirby	125	418	3.3	6
Floyd	78	231	3.0	3

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Owens	60	936	15.6	8
Stokes	58	733	12.6	4
Floyd	37	321	8.7	1

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
Anderson	38	38	29	36	125

PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk.
Thompson	78	3182	40.8	1

KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Levy	36	793	22.0	0

PUNT RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Uwaezucke	34	373	11.0	0

SACKS:	Stubblefield 15.0, Doleman 12.0, Greene 10.5,
INTERCEPTIONS:	Hanks 6, Drakelord 5, Woodson 3, McDonald 3, Walker 3.



Barry Sanders

## Workin' for a livin'

In 1996, 13 running backs had 250 or more carries. Here are the four who increased their carries this season and the five with the biggest decreases.

Going  
UP

Player	Team	1997	1996	Diff.
Jerome Bettis	Steelers	375	320	+55
Barry Sanders	Lions	335	307	+28
Terrell Davis	Broncos	369	345	+24
Eddie George	Oilers	357	335	+22

Going  
DOWN

Player	Team	1997	1996	Diff.
Rodney Hampton	Giants	23	254	-231
Anthony Johnson	Panthers	97	300	-203
Terry Allen	Redskins	210	347	-137
Thurman Thomas	Bills	154	281	-127
Ricky Watters	Eagles	285	353	-68

## Panthers

7-9 / T 2nd

### Age, injuries contribute to disappointing season



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** The season was a huge disappointment for a team that had come within one step of the Super Bowl in 1996. Everything unraveled in the preseason when

quarterback **Kerry Collins** broke his jaw, an injury that affected him all year. It didn't help that he had no chemistry with an unproven group of receivers that failed to step up. And it didn't help that the defense began showing its age and

couldn't stop the run. The holdout and release of **Kevin Greene** forced free-agent signee **Micheal Barrow** to move from inside to outside linebacker, where he didn't belong. And the other outside man, **Lamar Lathon**, battled injuries and did not come close to his 1996 form. On the bright side, rookie running back **Fred Lane**, tight

#### GRADING OUT 1997 season

**OFFENSE D-**  
Kerry Collins' third season was a disaster. The team ranked 27th in total offense.

**DEFENSE C**  
The line showed its age and stopping the run became a difficult chore.

**STRATEGY C**  
Dom Capers, 1996 Coach of the Year, had few answers this time around.

end **Wesley Walls** and return man **Michael Bates** enjoyed fine seasons.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** Look for management to make the defensive line its top priority in free agency and the college draft. Improvement on offense will need to come from within; an injection of depth and youth on the defensive line will have to come mostly from outside. ... Offensive questions include Collins, who led the league in interceptions and posted the lowest quarterback rating of any full-time NFL starter. Management has said it will commit to him for three more years, promising to exercise a buyback clause in Collins' contract that will guarantee him a \$6 million bonus. The future of 1996 first-round pick **Tshimanga Biakabutuka** is not so clear. He lost his job to Lane, an undrafted rookie, and Biakabutuka's fate will become a 1998 training-camp issue. ... Look for new faces on defense, including replacements for linebacker **Sam Mills** and nose tackle **Greg Kragen**, both of whom are planning to retire. —Joe Menzer

#### CAROLINA

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
Collins	381	200	52.5	2124	59t	11	21	55.7	27
Beuerlein	153	89	58.2	1032	52	6	3	83.6	17

RUSHING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Lane	182	809	4.4	7
Johnson	97	358	3.7	0
Biakabutuka	75	299	4.0	2

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Walls	58	746	12.9	6
Carruth	44	545	12.4	4
Greene	40	277	6.9	1

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
Kasay	25	25	22	26	91

PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk.
Walter	85	3604	42.4	0

KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Bates	47	1281	27.3	0

PUNT RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Poole	26	191	7.3	0

SACKS:	Barrow 8.5, Miller 5.5, Royal 5.0.
INTERCEPTIONS:	Davis 5, Poole 2, Cota 2.

## Rams

5-11 / 5th

### Subpar season sours Vermeil's comeback



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** Dick Vermeil's team spent much of the season walking the tightrope between victory and defeat. Three-fourths of its games were decided by 10 or

fewer points. During one late-season stretch, five straight games were won or lost on the team's final offensive possession. But the team lost most of those games, making Vermeil's return to football a big disappointment. If the offense had

#### GRADING OUT 1997 season

**OFFENSE D**  
Not enough big plays or pass protection from an overrated unit.

**DEFENSE C**  
Secondary sprang some leaks, but Bud Carson still has his fastball.

**STRATEGY D**  
This team was over-coached on the practice field and undisciplined on game day.

been a little better, or if kicker **Jeff Wilkins** had not fallen into a late-season funk, the team might have managed a .500 record. Overall, this is a team that didn't play smart, set a franchise record for most penalties and didn't have enough difference-makers who could come up with the big play at crucial times. Special teams

were a disaster, from the decision to jettison kicker **Sean Landeta** for rookie **Will Brice** and Wilkins' struggles, to coverage and return units that were well short of dynamic. The team's best free-agent finds were third-down back **Amp Lee** and defensive tackle **Bill Johnson**.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** On offense, a speed back would be a nice complement to hard-running halfback **Jerald Moore**. But, given the team's experience with **Lawrence Phillips**, it's not likely to invest another first-round draft pick on a running back. Another quality interior lineman is a must to bolster a unit that too often got pounded between the tackles. Given the overall youth on the offensive line, free agency might be the way to go, perhaps with a young veteran like Washington's **Joe Patton** at left guard. With two years already invested in quarterback **Tony Banks**, it would make no sense to dump him. Banks will be in the third year of a three-year contract, making 1998 a make-or-break season for him. —Jim Thomas

#### ST. LOUIS

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
Banks	487	252	51.7	3254	76	14	13	71.5	43
Ryplein	39	19	48.7	270	62	0	2	50.2	1

RUSHING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
J. Moore	104	379	3.6	3
Banks	47	186	4.0	1
Lee	28	104	3.7	0

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Lee	61	825	13.5	3
Bruce	56	815	14.6	5
Conwell	38	404	10.6	4

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
Wilkins	32	32	25	37	107

PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk.
Horan	53	2272	42.9	0

KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Thompson	49	1110	22.7	0

PUNT RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Kennison	34	247	7.3	0

SACKS:	O'Neal 10.0, Carter 8.0, Johnson 4.0.
INTERCEPTIONS:	McNeil 9, Lyle 6, Lyght 4.

## Saints

6-10 / 4th

### Ditka's first season brings mixed results



**1997 BREAKDOWN:** This season always will be remembered for the arrival of **Mike Ditka** as head coach. It took 10 games to begin seeing results following a 2-7 start. Four players—**Heath Shuler**,

**Danny Wuerffel**, **Doug Nussmeier** and **Billy Joe Hobert**—started at quarterback, a franchise first. Shuler, acquired from the Redskins in a trade, failed to live up to high expectations, and the quarterback carousel began. It didn't slow down

#### GRADING OUT 1997 season

**OFFENSE F**  
When you own the NFL's worst offense, what other grade can you give?

**DEFENSE B**  
Future looks bright for "The Swamp Dogs," who became one of the league's best.

**STRATEGY C**  
Franchise record in turnovers spoiled season, but coaches aren't to blame.

until Hobert took over for the final four games. The quarterbacks received little help from the offensive line or running backs **Ray Zellers** and **Mario Bates**. The offense was the NFL's worst. But the major bright spots for this team were a revitalized defense that ranked among the top 10 in the league and the play of special

teams, particularly kicker **Doug Brien**, returner **Eric Guliford** and punter **Mark Royals**.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** Acquiring high-impact, skill-position players on offense is the top offseason priority. Questions remain about whether Hobert is the long-term answer at quarterback, but Ditka's penchant for pulling quarterbacks makes landing a top-flight veteran free agent unlikely. The Saints, however, won't draft high enough to have a shot at franchise quarterbacks such as **Peyton Manning** and **Ryan Leaf**. With a probable top 10 pick, they should choose a running back or receiver who can help immediately. Nine starters, including middle linebacker **Winfred Tubbs** and right end **Joe Johnson**, are unrestricted free agents. Re-signing tight end **Irv Smith** should be a priority, but the fates of starting wide receivers **Randal Hill** and **Andre Hastings** are still to be determined. Bates likely will leave via free agency, and cornerback **Eric Allen** and safety **Anthony Newman** also could become expendable. —Mike Strom

#### NEW ORLEANS

PASSING	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yds.	Long	TD	Int.	Rate	Sacks
Shuler	203	106	52.2	1288	89t	2	14	46.6	21
Hobert	131	61	46.6	891	49	6	8	59.0	4

RUSHING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Zellers	156	552	3.5	4
Bates	119	440	3.7	4
T. Davis	75	271	3.6	0

RECEIVING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Hill	55	761	13.8	2
Hastings	48	722	15.0	5
Zellers	31	263	8.5	0

SCORING	XPM	XPA	FGM	FGA	Pts.
Brien	22	22	23	27	91

PUNTING	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk.
Royals	88	4038	45.9	0

KO RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Guliford	43	1128	26.2	1

PUNT RETURNS	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Guliford	47	498	10.6	0

SACKS:	Martin 10.5, J. Johnson 8.5, Fields 8.0.
INTERCEPTIONS:	Knight 5, Newman 3, Allen 2, Washington 2, Tubbs 2.



## Insider

Larry Wigge



WHAT'S MY LINE? That's a question Lindros (left) and LeClair might be asking after being split up to spread out the offense.

## Success is achieved by reading between the lines

One of hockey's greatest attractions is the way its players relate to one another, work together and make magic. Nothing is more basic to the sport than its offensive combinations—the three players who meld together on a one-for-all, all-for-one unit called a line.

The names Gordie Howe, Sid Abel and Ted Lindsay evoke special memories. *The Production Line* was the best three-man unit ever put together, a rare combination of power, speed and passing that was out of this world. It was no coincidence that championships followed the Red Wings in the 1940s and '50s.

Others will argue that Montreal's *Punch Line*—Toe Blake, Elmer Lach and Rocket Richard—and Boston's *Kraut Line*—Milt Schmidt, Bobby Bauer and Woody Dumart—were just as good.

The fascination with tic-tac-toe passing carried into contemporary times with the Rangers' *GAG Line* of Jean Ratelle, Rod Gilbert and Vic Hadfield, the Sabres' *French Connection Line* of Gilbert Perreault, Richard Martin and Rene Robert, Los Angeles' *Triple Crown Line* of

Marcel Dionne, Dave Taylor and Charlie Simmer and the Russian *KLM Line* with Vladimir Krutov, Igor Larionov and Sergei Makarov.

Other effective lines have lacked colorful

names while carrying on the winning tradition. How about Phil Esposito-Ken Hodge-Wayne Cashman in Boston, Bobby Clarke-Bill Barber-Reggie Leach in Philadelphia, Bryan Trottier-Mike Bossy-Clark Gillies on Long Island and Guy Lafleur-Jacques Lemaire-Peter Mahovlich in Montreal?

But now, discounting the two-plus-season success of Philadelphia's Eric Lindros-John LeClair-Mikael Renberg *Legion of Doom Line*, the days of putting together three players, pointing them toward the ice and waiting for that line to produce magical results apparently are over. In fact, some coaches have doomed their careers by trying to force three players together.

With the trade of Renberg to Tampa Bay, Flyers coach Wayne Cashman, who knows as much as anybody about productive lines, has taken to splitting up Lindros and LeClair, trying to get more production from the rest of the team.

"Eric and John will be back together again, but the depth teams can build up is the key to make life miserable for your opponent," Cashman says. "One line can be checked into the ground. So, the coach kind of becomes a chemist, trying to find the right elements that can spark a player or two or three to click."

Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. Trying to find that chemistry might be the most critical—and elusive—role a coach can play.

"We spent millions in St. Louis trying to find the right threesome to upgrade Brett Hull from a \$4 million player to a \$6 million player," Canucks coach Mike Keenan says of his days behind the Blues bench. "First, we went into the free-agent market and paid a lot of money to Shayne Corson and Dale Hawerchuk. Then, we traded for Wayne Gretzky. Even later, we went after Pierre Turgeon. None of those moves worked completely."

Stars coach Ken Hitchcock has given up trying to find three compatible players. He'd much rather count by twos—as in Mike Modano and Jere Lehtinen, Joe Nieuwendyk and Pat Verbeek.

"You can drive yourself up a wall trying to find the right three guys," Hitchcock says. "That's why I'd rather make life easier by trying to find two guys and mix and match the other spot on a line."

The bottom line on lines: One-line teams don't win Stanley Cups.

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### Line dancing

**Best three-man lines:** Colorado's Peter Forsberg-Claude Lemieux-Valeri Kamensky; Detroit's Igor Larionov-Brendan Shanahan-Darren McCarty; Dallas' Mike Modano-Jere Lehtinen-Jamie Langenbrunner; Montreal's Saku Koivu-Shayne Corson-Mark Recchi.

**Most exciting twosomes:** Anaheim's Paul Kariya and Teemu Selanne; Vancouver's Mark Messier and Pavel Bure.

**Still spells DOOM:** Philadelphia's Eric Lindros and John LeClair.

**The Czech's in the mail:** Pittsburgh's Jaromir Jagr and Ron Francis minus free-agent Petr Nedved; the Islanders' Robert Reichel and Zigmund Palffy.

**The beek is back:** Dallas' Joe Nieuwendyk and Pat Verbeek.

**Not deadheads:** Colorado's Joe Sakic and Adam Deadmarsh.

**Wayne's world:** The Rangers' Wayne Gretzky and Nicklas Sundstrom.

**Most underrated:** Edmonton's Doug Weight and Ryan Smyth; Ottawa's Alexei Yashin and Daniel Alfredsson.

**Other notables:** Washington's Adam Oates and Peter Bondra; New Jersey's Doug Gilmour and Patrik Elias; Phoenix's Keith Tkachuk and Craig Janney.

## The book on Chris Phillips

Senators, D 6-2 / 213

Igor Kravchuk, a big smile creasing his face, greets Phillips in a hallway outside their St. Louis locker room and says, "Now that you've gotten your first goal playing up front, I guess you'll want to be a left winger full time."

Phillips throws a playful punch at Kravchuk's chest and assures him he won't lose that rock 'em, sock 'em defenseman's mindset.

"But," he says, laughing, "I am on an 80-goal pace playing up front."

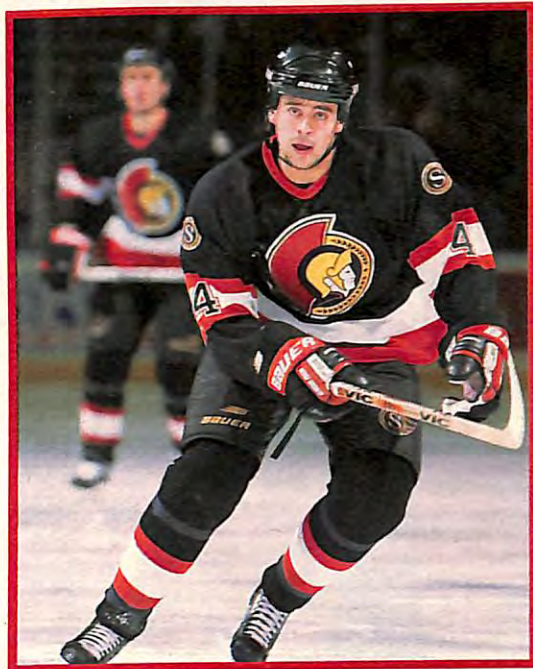
With wingers Daniel Alfredsson and Bruce Gardiner out for at least six weeks with injuries, Phillips showed his character and team-first attitude by volunteering for extra ice time.

That character is what attracted the scouts to Phillips in 1996, when he was the first overall pick in the draft. Character on the ice and off.

Ten years ago, Phillips' mother was partially paralyzed when a virus attacked her spinal cord. Two years later, his father was rendered 90 percent blind, a victim of diabetes.

Chris and sister Jennifer had to grow up quickly and take family responsibility.

"You don't want to take the chance of ruining a can't-miss prospect by



ED MESSEN / TSN

pushing him to do things he will have to grow into," Senators G.M. Pierre Gauthier says. "That's counter-productive when you know he will be one of the best defensemen in the NHL someday."

The native of Fort McMurray, Alberta, is a big, tough 19-year-old with a giant upside.

"He doesn't hit like (Panthers youngster) Ed Jovanovski, but he's more assertive than most young defensemen," coach Jacques Martin says. "It's easy to see why I get so excited just thinking about how good he's going to be."

## TSN's Power Poll

Rk.	Team	W-L-T	Comment
1.	Dallas	23-9-4	We told you Langenbrunner belongs on the U.S. Olympic Team.
2.	Detroit	20-9-7	Brown and muckers still know how to grind out victories.
3.	New Jersey	23-10-1	Defense? 4 goals scored by St. Louis, 5 by Detroit.
4.	Colorado	18-8-11	Roy returns from abdominal strain, but his injuries are a concern.
5.	Philadelphia	19-9-7	A happy Lindros (2-year, \$16 million contract) is a productive Lindros.
6.	Pittsburgh	18-10-8	Jagr continues to get mauled by opponents.
7.	St. Louis	20-12-4	Fuhr rips team's forwards for not being responsible defensively.
8.	Montreal	18-14-4	Corson goes to second line in attempt to get Damphousse going.
9.	Boston	16-13-6	Bourque hasn't lost a thing—after seeing him play Lindros and Co.
10.	Washington	15-13-7	Without Juneau to worry about, opponents blanket Oates and Bondra.
11.	N.Y. Islanders	14-15-5	Reichel and Palffy continue to be an effective combination.
12.	Phoenix	14-15-6	Finally, help is on the way for defense. Tverdokvsky re-signs.
13.	Ottawa	15-16-4	Goalies Tugnut, Rhodes get a refresher course from Phil Myre.
14.	Los Angeles	13-14-6	Kings have scored first goal only 11 times (10-1 in those games).
15.	Carolina	13-17-5	Troublesome stat: Hurricanes are 4-8-2 vs. teams in own division.
16.	Buffalo	11-16-6	Four shutouts in last 14 games for Hasek.
17.	N.Y. Rangers	10-15-11	Losing Beukeboom 4-6 weeks will make things even tougher.
18.	Florida	12-18-5	Penalty killing is killing the Panthers.
19.	San Jose	13-18-4	Iafate's return has given team's transition game a real boost.
20.	Edmonton	11-16-8	Arnott for Hamrik? I'd make that trade in a minute.
21.	Anaheim	12-17-6	Now that Kariya's on board, help is needed for defense.
22.	Toronto	11-17-5	Rookie Johnson gets first road point after 21 at home.
23.	Chicago	10-17-7	So Daze reminds Billy Reay of Rocket Richard. Amazing!
24.	Vancouver	11-19-5	Linden and Gelinat feel the wrath of Iron Mike.
25.	Calgary	10-19-7	Titov responds to coach's mind games by scoring, and scoring ...
26.	Tampa Bay	7-21-5	No centers, no scoring, no cohesion on offense or defense.

Through last Friday's games.

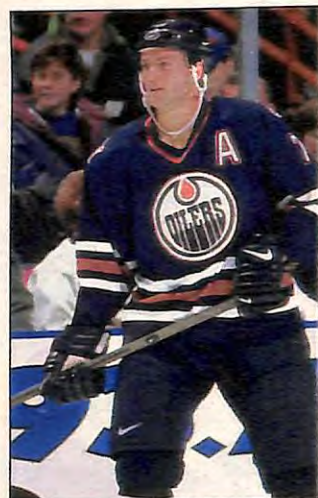
The Sporting News NHL Power Poll is determined by TSN Hockey Editor Larry Wigge.

## inside dish

FRONT OFFICE  
RUMBLINGS  
AND LOCKER  
ROOM  
WHISPERS

Here's the kind of thinking that shows how out of touch Blackhawks owner **Bill Wirtz** is with the game: "We've got some great young players," he says. "We could get two or three players for one, but we prefer to stay with **Mr. Daze** and **Mr. Moreau**. Ask (former coach) **Billy Reay** about Daze. He says the more he looks at Daze, the more he reminds him of **Rocket Richard**." The Rocket? **Jacques Richard**, maybe. ... Rumors about Oilers center **Jason Arnott** being traded to Tampa Bay for defenseman **Roman Hamrik** won't go away. Oilers G.M. **Glen Sather** says, "Arnie's like **John LeClair** was in Montreal—and look what happened after he was traded to Philadelphia." Sather says he'll try other packages to get Hamrik. But only Arnott will bring Hamrik to Edmonton.

The Hoboken Devils? Money-hungry New Jersey owner **John McMullen** got bad advice on that one. **Frank Sinatra**, not **Frank Mahovlich**, was born in Hoboken. ... Washington G.M. **George McPhee** wonders about the NHL's disciplinary system. "You say a bad word (racial remarks sidelined Washington's **Chris Simon** and **Craig Berube**) and you get three games. You



TRADE BAIT: Arnott could get Edmonton a Roman holiday.

knee someone and could put them out for a year, and what are you going to get? (L.A.'s **Sandy Moger** takes out **Joe Juneau** for four-to-six weeks with a low hit—and he gets nothing. Incredible!" ... The feud between Vancouver coach **Mike Keenan** and **Neil Smith**, his boss with the Rangers, re-heated last week when Keenan accused Smith of floating a rumored trade of Canucks' forwards **Trevor Linden** and **Martin Gelinat** for Rangers' forwards **Adam Graves** and **Alexei Kovalev** and defenseman **Alexander Karpovtsev**. "Neil's up to his old tricks, putting it out in the media to see if it will be accepted in New York. We haven't talked to anyone about Trevor Linden." Maybe not, but embarrassing Linden in front of teammates suggests his Vancouver career is in jeopardy.

Devils G.M. **Lou Lamoriello** says the best way to open up the game is to move the net three feet farther from the backboards, to 13 feet. Flyers G.M. **Bobby Clarke** agrees with him on this issue. Says Clarke: "Right now, you shoot the puck in, the defense blocks the forechecking and the goaltender shoots the puck back out. Or the defenseman goes back and gets it and rips it off the glass and out. If the goal is moved out, you subtract six feet from the neutral zone and add more room to the scoring zone. That's key."



## Inside the Game With Mike Keenan

### Mind games

In Vancouver, one of the big stories has been my challenge to Trevor Linden and Martin Gelinas to step up their play. Some may call that playing mind games with your players—I call it motivation.

Players do not always realize the challenges they have ahead of them, so as a coach, I have to make them mentally tough, capable of facing the adversities they will encounter at each step of the playoffs. My experience in getting teams to the Stanley Cup Finals four times tells me that element of mental toughness is vitally important.

I felt in this case I was extremely patient. I waited for a month for the players to try to comprehend some of the new concepts. Knowing when and how to push the right button with players becomes an intuitive feeling, and sometimes it's a move that has an element of risk. I've made mistakes, we all have. For instance, I was wrong with Brett Hull. But you learn from those mistakes.

You can develop a reputation for a certain coaching and personality style like I have ("Iron Mike"), and there's an expectation that goes along with your persona. In Vancouver, however, I don't think my persona has helped me gain the players' attention—yet.

If your leaders believe in you, it's easier to capture the trust of other players. Having Mark Messier helps, but the job of understanding how to motivate players goes all the way up to the playoffs.



### COUNTDOWN TO NAGANO

He has accomplished something Patrick Roy, Martin Brodeur, Mike Richter and Dominik Hasek haven't. But the Islanders' Tommy Salo still is not recognized as one of the top goalies in the NHL.

Salo led Sweden to the last Olympic gold medal in 1994—an honor he shares only with Anaheim's Mikhail Shtalenkov (the 1992 Unified Team) among active NHL goalies. But many believe Sweden's goaltending will prevent it from winning back-to-back golds, despite the presence of such stars as Peter Forsberg, Mats Sundin, Mikael Renberg, Daniel Alfredsson, Nicklas Lidstrom and Nicklas Sundstrom.

NHL *Dream Teams* from Canada, the United States and Russia appear to be far stronger—better shooters in particular—than anything Salo faced in '94.

"He's a great goaltender when he's hot," says Sabres center Michael Peca, alluding to a seven-game stretch in which Salo recorded two shutouts and a 1.85 goals-against average. "He can carry a team."

But only a similar streak at Nagano will change the perception that he isn't an elite NHL goalie.



Salo

## BENCH PRESSING

Some coaches are worth recycling. Scotty Bowman, for one, has won Stanley Cups with Montreal, Pittsburgh and Detroit. This year, Jacques Demers and Mike Keenan have joined Bowman as coaches of five different NHL teams. Both, however, will have a difficult time making the playoffs.

Coach	Teams	Current job	Previous teams
Roger Neilson	6	Assistant, St. Louis	Tor, Buf, Van, LA, NYR, Fla
Scotty Bowman	5	Detroit	StL, Mtl, Buf, Pit
Jacques Demers	5	Tampa Bay	Que, StL, Det, Mtl
Mike Keenan	5	Vancouver	Phil, Chi, NYR, StL
Sid Abel	4	Out of hockey	Chi, Det, StL, KC
Bob Berry	4	Out of hockey	LA, Mtl, Pit, StL
Rick Bowness	4	N.Y. Islanders	Wpg, Bos, Ott
Pierre Page	4	Anaheim	Min, Que, Cgy
Jim Schoenfeld	4	Phoenix	Buf, NJ, Was
Johnny Wilson	4	Out of hockey	LA, Det, Col, Pit

### Repeat performers

Teams that have employed more than one head coach from the above list:

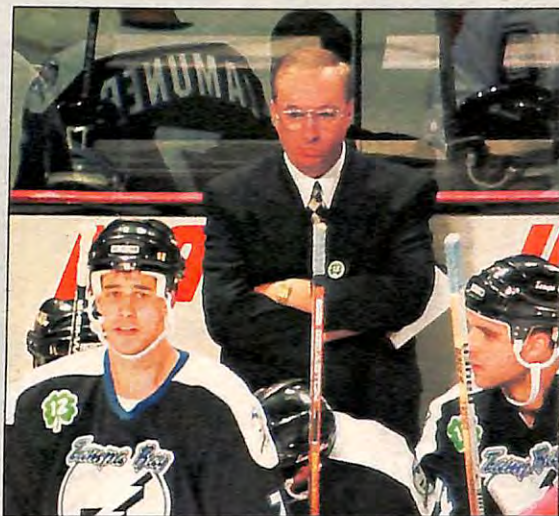
Team	Coaches
St. Louis	5
Detroit	4
Buf, LA, Mtl, Pit	3
Van, NYR, Chi, Que	2

### Their Cup runneth over

Stanley Cup winners:

Bowman	7	Mtl (5), Pit (1), Det (1)
Demers	1	Mtl
Keenan	1	NYR

**JACQUES BE NIMBLE:** Demers can't work miracles in Tampa Bay.



RYAN REMICK / AP

### INDIVIDUAL SCORING LEADERS

PLAYER	GP	G	A	PTS	+/-	PIM	PP	SH	GW	GT	S	PCTG
FORSBERG, Col	34	14	32	46	4	42	5	1	3	1	116	12.1
BURE, Van	35	22	22	44	6	20	6	3	4	0	132	16.7
LECLAIR, Phi	35	26	17	43	15	18	7	0	5	0	138	18.8
SAKIC, Col	37	17	25	42	6	26	8	0	1	0	150	11.3
LAFONTAINE, NYR	36	16	25	41	-7	20	6	0	2	3	95	16.8
LINDROS, Phi	34	15	24	39	8	67	3	0	3	0	106	14.2
SELANNE, Anh	35	26	12	38	4	14	5	0	5	2	126	20.6
JAGR, Pit	32	16	22	38	4	26	3	0	6	1	108	14.8
MODANO, Dal	29	15	23	38	13	12	5	3	2	0	112	13.4
FRANCIS, Pit	36	10	27	37	-1	4	2	0	3	1	78	12.8
BONDRA, Was	31	21	15	36	-2	20	7	0	5	2	108	19.4
REICHEL, NYI	34	15	21	36	0	14	4	0	0	1	92	16.3
CORSON, Mon	36	12	24	36	3	40	8	0	1	0	68	17.6
HOLIK, NJ	34	17	18	35	16	48	5	0	5	0	92	18.5
RECCHI, Mon	36	16	18	34	10	17	3	0	3	0	80	20.0
FLEURY, Cgy	36	13	21	34	15	88	1	2	2	1	107	12.1
OATES, Was	35	8	26	34	0	8	1	1	2	0	60	13.3

### ROOKIE SCORING LEADERS

PLAYER	GP	G	A	PTS	+/-	PIM	PP	SH	GW	GT	S	PCTG
JOHNSON, Tor	33	7	16	23	-2	4	3	0	0	0	58	12.1
STURM, SJ	34	7	13	20	3	18	1	0	3	0	58	12.1
ELIAS, NJ	30	12	7	19	12	10	3	0	5	0	53	22.6
PROSPAL, Phi	35	5	11	16	-11	15	4	0	0	0	50	10.0
ZEDNIK, Was	34	10	5	15	-1	22	2	0	0	0	82	12.2

### DEFENSEMAN SCORING LEADERS

PLAYER	GP	G	A	PTS	+/-	PIM	PP	SH	GW	GT	S	PCTG
ZUBOV, Dal	36	4	27	31	13	2	1	1	1	0	68	5.9
NIEDERMAYER, NJ	34	7	21	28	8	12	6	0	1	0	76	9.2
LIDSTROM, Det	35	13	14	27	1	12	5	1	1	1	97	13.4
DUCHESNE, StL	36	5	22	27	13	10	1	0	0	0	66	7.6
MURPHY, Det	36	4	22	26	13	21	1	0	2	0	52	7.7

### GOALS-AGAINST AVERAGE / SAVE PERCENTAGE

GOALTENDER	GPI	MINS	GA	AVG	SA	SV%	W	L	T
BRODEUR, NJ	28	1662	50	1.81	652	.923	21	7	0
BELFOUR, Dal	30	1738	53	1.83	605	.912	19	6	4
TUGNUTT, Ott	17	959	30	1.88	355	.915	7	6	3
HEXTALL, Phi	17	1008	33	1.96	387	.915	10	3	4
IRBE, Van	12	595	20	2.02	294	.932	5	3	1
BARRASSO, Pit	30	1720	59	2.06	742	.920	16	7	6
TERRERI, Chi	17	972	36	2.22	386	.907	7	9	0
FUHR, StL	29	1731	65	2.25	671	.903	16	9	4
OSGOOD, Det	28	1690	64	2.27	703	.909	15	7	6

### GOALS

NAME	GP	G
SELANNE, Anh	35	26
LECLAIR, Phi	35	26
BURE, Van	35	22
BONDRA, Was	31	21
TKACHUK, Pho	34	19
HOLIK, NJ	34	17
NIJEWENDYK, Dal	35	17
SAKIC, Col	37	17
JAGR, Pit	32	16
SHANAHAN, Det	32	16
PERREAULT, LA	33	16
HULL, StL	34	16
PALFFY, NYI	34	16
LAFONTAINE, NYR	36	16
RECCHI, Mon	36	16
LANGENBRUNN, Dal	36	16

### ASSISTS

NAME	GP	A
FORSBERG, Col	34	32
FRANCIS, Pit	36	27
ZUBOV, Dal	36	27
OATES, Was	35	26
LAFONTAINE, NYR	36	25
SAKIC, Col	37	25
STUMPEL, LA	33	24
GILMOUR, NJ	34	24
LINDROS, Phi	34	24
JANNEY, Pho	35	24
CORSON, Mon	36	24
MODANO, Dal	29	23
ALLISON, Bos	35	23
KOIVU, Mon	36	23
JAGR, Pit	32	22
BURE, Van	35	22
MURPHY, Det	36	22
DUCHESNE, StL	36	22

### GAME WINNERS

NAME	GP	GWG
JAGR, Pit	32	6
ROBITAILLE, LA	33	6
ELIAS, NJ	30	5
BONDRA, Was	31	5
SHANAHAN, Det	32	5
FRIESE, SJ	32	5
HULL, StL	34	5
HOLIK, NJ	34	5
SELANNE, Anh	35	5
LECLAIR, Phi	35	5
ALLISON, Bos	35	5
KAPANEN, Car	35	5

### SHOTS

NAME	GP	S
SAKIC, Col	37	150
LECLAIR, Phi	35	138
BURE, Van	35	132
SELANNE, Anh	35	126
SHANAHAN, Det	32	125
HULL, StL	34	122
LEMIEUX, Col	36	122

### FIRST GOALS

NAME	GP	FG
SELANNE, Anh	35	10
NIJEWENDYK, Dal	35	8
SAKIC, Col	37	8
LANGENBRUNN, Dal	36	7
BRIND'AMOUR, Phi	35	6

### PLUS MINUS

NAME	GP	+/-
ZUBOV, Phi	27	20
SYDOR, Dal	33	19
MCKAY, NJ	34	19
PRONGER, StL	36	19
LUDWIG, Dal	36	17
KRUPP, Col	37	17
TSYPLAKOV, LA	25	16
LEHTINEN, Dal	26	16
HOLIK, NJ	34	16
VERBEEK, Dal	36	16
PERREAULT, LA	33	15
LARIONOV, Det	34	15
LECLAIR, Phi	35	15
FLEURY, Cgy	36	15

### POWER-PLAY GOALS

NAME	GP	PPG
SHANAHAN, Det	32	9
HULL, StL	34	8
CORSON, Mon	36	8
SAKIC, Col	37	8
BERARD, NYI	28	7
BONDRA, Was	31	7
LECLAIR, Phi	35	7



Mike DeCourcy

## Insider

## This year's ACC isn't in a league of its own—yet

Using The Associated Press poll as your guide, you're forced to believe this year's Atlantic Coast Conference is one of the great leagues in history. Listening to the poll, though, you'd

have believed Michigan suddenly became a Top 25 team by beating Duke at home. So it's not that simple.

Earlier this month, the ACC became only the second conference to place seven teams in the poll at once and held that distinction until Clemson and Georgia Tech took a slight tumble a couple weeks later. With North Carolina State also playing winning basketball, though, ACC supporters began talking about something far more significant: becoming the first conference to have eight teams selected to the NCAA Tournament.

The Big Ten was the first to place seven, in 1990, and also did it in 1994. The Big East received seven bids in 1991. The ACC never has gotten in seven of its nine members, but this may be the deepest the league has been. "From top to bottom, I can't remember it being this tough," says Bobby Cremins, who is in his 17th season as coach at Georgia Tech.

There are those who maintain the ACC isn't even the best conference. Most work in the Southeastern Conference, and they can present a pretty good argument. The SEC has a 30-13 NCAA Tournament record the past three seasons, far better than the ACC's 25-16.

For the ACC to be absolutely, completely colossal this season, a few things need to happen during January and February:

**Clemson better get quicker.** Switching Greg Buckner from small forward to shooting guard might have seemed like a good idea, but the Tigers are losing too much of their defensive punch.

**Wake better wake up.** After shooting itself into anonymity last season, Wake Forest is on a similar track. The Deacons went 6-6 in their final 12 games last season, with guards attempting slightly more than half the team's shots. The little guys shot 45 percent of the time during an 18-1 start. There's a connection there.

The lack of balance is more exaggerated this year, with guards taking seven of every 10 shots in losses to Utah and Marshall. Coach Dave Odom's best weapons are small guys, but Wake Forest will struggle if it can't squeeze consistent offense from power forward Niki Arinze and center Loren Woods, neither of whom was shooting 40 percent.

**NC State better hang on.** The



**SHOT-STOPPER:** Clemson's defensive pressure is better when Buckner plays in the backcourt.

Wolfpack lost much of its board strength when sophomore Damon Thornton went down with an injury. Freshmen big men Kenny Inge and Ron Kelley are doing what they can, but the defense

## Another Nightmare

Is it mere coincidence all these "overrated" McDonald's All-Americans wind up at Indiana? Andrae Patterson, Neil Reed—and now Jason Collier, who's getting the same treatment from many IU fans as Reed did when he left the Hoosiers after last season claiming physical and verbal abuse by Knight drove him from Bloomington.

Collier, a highly skilled 7-foot sophomore center, averaged 10.7 points and 5.2 rebounds and shot 56.3 percent in nine games this season, then decided to transfer because he no longer could handle Knight's confrontational style. Georgia Tech, where his father Jeff played, appears to be his first choice for a new school.

Collier says he tried to block out Knight's hollering, but it just didn't work. "Certain people can play for him," Collier told the Springfield (Ohio) *News-Sun*, "but not me."

It isn't easy to be sympathetic with any player who chooses to play for Knight and finds his methods unacceptable, because how the coach operates is hardly a secret. This has been happening for more than two decades.

What should bother Hoosiers fans is that IU has gone 2-4 in the NCAA Tournament since 1994, while the Hoosiers' peer group—Kansas, North Carolina and Kentucky—has won a combined 34 tournament games. NCAA recruiting rules empowered the prestige programs, limiting the ability of other schools to outwork the big guys, but that hasn't prevented Indiana's decline.

Knight's approach keeps some gifted players from considering Indiana and chases away others who choose the Hoosiers. If it still produced championships, there would be no debate as to its merits. But it has been a while.

has to be tenacious and the offensive execution flawless to compensate for the rebounding poundings.

**Georgia Tech better grow up.** Freshmen Dion Glover, Alvin Jones and Travis Spivey have done much to contribute to the Yellow Jackets' strong start, but Cremins insists each can improve. Spivey was shooting 41.7 percent from the field and hanging one assist ahead of an even assist/turnover ratio. Jones has been an amazing shot blocker, but he can provide more on offense. Glover was averaging better than 20 points and shooting proficiently, except on long-distance shots.

## Table crumbs

Louisville managed to wrangle a preseason Top 25 ranking from those who somehow failed to notice guards DeJuan Wheat and Alvin Sims were responsible for the Cardinals' Sweet 16 and Elite Eight finishes, respectively, the past two years. With those guys gone, the Cardinals lost four of their first six and dropped their fans into a state of alarm.

There is widespread criticism of recruiting work done by Denny Crum and his assistants, in light of the fact they went 0-for-the-fall and have only three blue-chip recruits on the roster: small forward Nate Johnson, center Alex Sanders (who's playing out of position) and point guard Cameron Murray (who transferred from Southern California).

One problem in recruiting is beyond the coaches' control: Louisville suddenly isn't producing players. When Eaves became a Louisville assistant last summer, he promised Kentucky never would get another player out of the city. That presupposed the 'Cats would want one. Louisville has produced only one player who ranked among TSN's consensus Top 100 prospects in the past two years. There has not been an elite player in the city since Jason Osborne.

Recruiting analyst Clark Francis, whose *Hoop Scoop* service is based in Louisville, suggests Kentucky high school regulations that prohibit playing AAU ball during the school year is retarding the development of the state's players. "In terms of player development," Francis says, "Kentucky's in the dark ages."

But Francis says this is not Louisville's only recruiting problem. He says his survey of 30 top junior prospects did not turn up anyone interested in the Cardinals. "If they were beating the bushes, doing this great job of getting involved with all the young kids, their name would be showing up," Francis says. "They don't go after it with the same zest and zeal as a lot of coaches." **TSN**

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## Women's notes

### Top frosh leads Bears' resurgence

The Hammons Center security guards already know Southwest Missouri State freshman Jackie Stiles well. She's the one who drops by late at night and sneaks into the gym to shoot.

Stiles broke her wrist as a sophomore at Claflin (Kan.) High and began a routine she still employs. She makes 1,000 shots a day—500 free throws, 500 jump shots.

"I can't get her out of the gym," SMSU coach Cheryl Burnett says. "She's in there after they've locked the building. I have to threaten her."

Her shooting obsession is paying off: Stiles leads her team in scoring (20 ppg). And SMSU won its first seven, with victories over Top 25 foes Illinois (77-62) and Arkansas (79-67).

Recruiting analyst Joe Smith says Stiles is the best freshman in the country, better than anyone in Tennessee's top-ranked recruiting class.

Numerous schools wanted her, but Stiles opted for the Springfield, Mo., program, a 6½-hour drive from Claflin. Her signing was a milestone of sorts for the program, which went to the Final Four in 1992 but fell out of the rank-

ings after injuries took their toll.

This fall, her preseason routine was four times a week with 1,000 shots, an hour of ballhandling work, regular practice (sometimes four hours long) and pickup games with the guys.

"In preseason, I went crazy," Stiles says. "I had to back off my workouts. (Burnett said), 'You don't understand the college schedule, how tough it can become.'"

### Backcourt blues

Stanford avoided its worst start in 17 years by beating then-No. 5 Illinois last week. Since last year's backcourt is playing professionally (Kate Starbird, ABL; Jamila Wideman, WNBA), coach Tara VanDerveer is relying on sophomores Milena Flores and Melody Peterson, and the team averages more than 20 turnovers a game.

Help is on the way in the form of volleyball player Kristen Folkl, who joined the team in midseason last year and led the Cardinal in rebounding (8.2 rpg). She likely will be available late this week. —Lori Riley

## Games to watch

**NORTH CAROLINA AT GEORGIA, NOON SATURDAY, CBS:** The size and depth of the Bulldogs could pose problems for the Tar Heels, whose frontcourt is talented but young. Don't look for Georgia to panic if it gets behind, as this is a veteran team with one of the nation's top freshmen in 6-7 Jumaime Jones. But North Carolina's athleticism on the perimeter may be too much to overcome.

**PUERTO RICO CLASSIC FINAL, 8 P.M. ET, FRIDAY, FOX SPORTS NET:** This matchup could pit any team from Arkansas to Michigan to Murray State against Syracuse, St. Louis, Iowa State or TCU. About the only team that doesn't have a chance to make the final is the host, American University.

**RAINBOW CLASSIC, 12:30 A.M. MONDAY AND TUESDAY, ESPN:** In this case, keep an eye on host Hawaii and its underrated backcourt duo of Anthony Carter and Alikea Smith. But Kansas, which will receive a boost in the middle from the eligibility of 6-8 LSU transfer Lester Earl, is still the favorite. The rest of the field includes BYU, Ohio State, New Mexico State, Vanderbilt, Nebraska and Virginia. Monday's game is a semifinal, Tuesday's is the title game.

## Coaches corner:

### WHAT SKILLS DO YOU LOOK FOR IN A RECRUIT?



**Charlie Spoonhour, Saint Louis:** "Quickness is by far the most important single ingredient. However, it's difficult to focus solely on athletic skills when academics play as large a part as they do."



**Wendy Larry, Old Dominion women:** "Speed and natural strength, stamina, good hands and quick feet. Intangibles that are just as important are work ethic, commitment, court awareness, leadership skills and a positive attitude."



**Leon Barmore, Louisiana Tech women:** "Quickness, size, shooting ability and the ability to create their own shot."

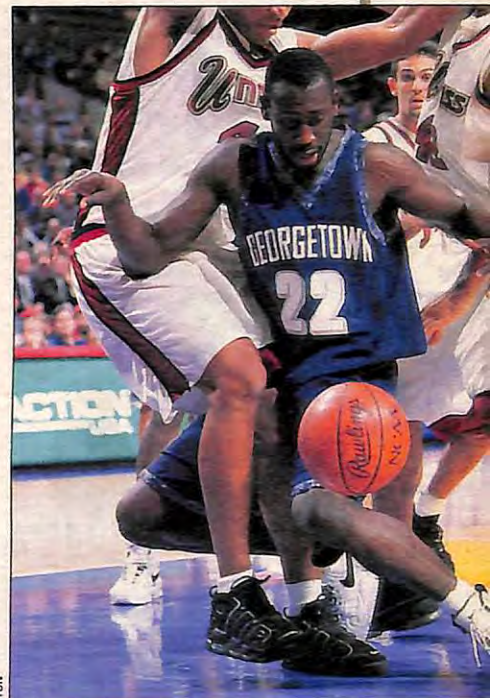
# inside dish

CAMPUS RUMBLINGS AND LOCKER ROOM WHISPERS

In a game against Bethune-Cookman, Georgetown made six 3-pointers—half as many as it tallied in its first six games combined. The Hoyas entered that game with the lowest 3-point percentage among major-conference teams, but at least they're smart enough not to shoot many. Arizona and Connecticut each had two players with more attempts than Georgetown. Among the Hoyas' five double-figure scorers, only **Shernard Long** had more than two 3-pointers. ... Fresno State point guard **Rafer Alston** injured his wrist and knee in a car accident when he decided to make a late-night drive to Los Angeles after the Bulldogs lost to Pacific. With Alston limited to 14 minutes, Fresno State dropped its fourth in a row, to St. Mary's.

Iowa State hopes it filled its gaping hole at point guard by plucking 5-11 guard **Ty Shine** out of prep school. Shine was at Milford (Conn.) Academy when he achieved a qualifying test score this fall, making him eligible to join a Division I team at the semester break. ... St. John's is back in the talent market, having dismissed 6-9 **James Felton** for repeated team rules violations. The Johnnies thought they were done with all but the **Al Harrington** portion of their recruiting work—they're among the finalists for the player ranked No. 1 by analyst **Brick Oettinger**—but will need to find another big body. Felton skipped four consecutive days of practice following a game when he was disappointed with his minutes. It had reached a point where he was disrupting the program.

Although top shooting guard prospect **JaRon Rush** of Kansas City made an oral commitment to Kansas, that apparently isn't keeping Georgia Tech out of the hunt. And the Yellow Jackets may get a recruiting visit out of him. ... Power forward **Korleone Young** of Wichita, TSN's consensus No. 1 prospect, is believed to be a lock for UNLV—if he doesn't enter the draft—because cousin **Myron Piggie Jr.** has committed there. But Young looks as though he'll make a January visit to Arkansas. ... It was sad to see the passing of Colgate coach **Jack Bruen**, who lost a battle to pancreatic cancer.



**SAY AW:** It's not a pretty sight when Boubacar Aw and his Hoya mates shoot 3-pointers.

# NCAA Leaders

## MEN

### Individual

#### Scoring

Rk.	Name, school	Cl.	G	FG	3FG	FT	Pts.	Avg.
1.	Charles Jones, Long Island	Sr	7	82	24	29	217	31.0
2.	Wally Szczerbiak, Miami (O)	Jr	8	78	29	32	217	27.1
3.	Mike Powell, Loyola (Md.)	Sr	8	63	16	70	212	26.5
4.	Lee Nailon, TCU	Jr	9	103	0	32	238	26.4
	Jarmica Reese, Air Force	Sr	5	42	21	27	132	26.4
6.	Mike Jones, TCU	Sr	9	87	21	42	237	26.3
7.	Earl Boykins, Eastern Mich.	Sr	4	37	13	13	100	25.0
8.	Brett Eppheimer, Lehigh	Jr	7	49	22	53	173	24.7
9.	Fred Meeks, Maine	Jr	8	73	26	24	196	24.5
10.	A. Brockington, Coppin St.	Sr	5	46	14	16	122	24.4
11.	Pat Garrity, Notre Dame	Sr	7	61	11	37	170	24.3
12.	Michael Redd, Ohio State	Fr	7	61	15	30	167	23.9
13.	Cory Carr, Texas Tech	Sr	7	53	14	42	162	23.1
14.	Larry Hughes, St. Louis	Fr	7	59	7	36	161	23.0
15.	Bonzi Wells, Ball St.	Sr	8	64	9	43	180	22.5

#### Rebounding

Rk.	Name, school	Cl.	G	No.	Avg.
1.	Eric Taylor, St. Francis (Pa.)	Sr	6	85	14.2
2.	Ryan Perryman, Dayton	Sr	7	97	13.9
3.	Nick Davis, Arkansas	Sr	7	94	13.4
4.	Evan Eschmeyer, Northwestern	Sr	6	76	12.7
5.	Allen Ledbetter, Maine	Jr	8	101	12.6
6.	Kzell Wesson, La Salle	Jr	5	62	12.4
	Zendon Hamilton, St. John's	Sr	8	99	12.4
8.	T.J. Lux, Northern Illinois	Jr	4	48	12.0
9.	Thad Burton, Wright St.	Sr	8	93	11.6
10.	Brian Skinner, Baylor	Sr	8	92	11.5
11.	Ryan Moss, Arkansas-Little Rock	Jr	7	80	11.4
	Venson Hamilton, Nebraska	Jr	10	114	11.4
13.	Matt Harpring, Georgia Tech	Sr	6	67	11.2
14.	Rashon Turner, Fairleigh Dickinson	Sr	7	78	11.1
	Raef LaFrentz, Kansas	Sr	12	133	11.1

#### Field-goal percentage

Rk.	Name, school	Cl.	G	FG	FGA	Pct.
1.	Mark Madsen, Stanford	So	5	28	35	80.0
2.	Jarrett Stephens, Penn St.	Jr	7	44	62	71.0
3.	Ryan Moss, Arkansas-Little Rock	Jr	7	57	82	69.5
4.	Baron Davis, UCLA	Fr	5	28	41	68.3
5.	Michael Olowokandi, Pacific	Sr	10	83	122	68.0
6.	Hamp Jones, Georgia Southern	So	7	36	53	67.9
	Marcus Faison, Siena	So	6	38	56	67.9
8.	Nate Holmstadt, Montana St.	Jr	7	43	64	67.2
9.	Brad Miller, Purdue	Sr	8	51	76	67.1
	Leon Watson, Texas-San Antonio	So	8	55	82	67.1

#### 3-point field-goal percentage

Rk.	Name, school	Cl.	G	3FG	3FGA	Pct.
1.	Jamie Cammaert, Canisius	Jr	7	11	15	73.3
2.	Coby Turner, Dayton	Jr	7	14	20	70.0
3.	Greg Gaffney, Drexel	Jr	4	6	9	66.7
4.	Scott Effertz, Kent	Jr	7	16	26	61.5
5.	Anthony Carter, Hawaii	Sr	5	13	22	59.1
6.	Chris Crosby, Washington St.	So	8	17	29	58.6
	Joda Burgess, Marshall	Fr	6	17	29	58.6
	Jim Cantamessa, Siena	So	6	17	29	58.6
9.	Anthony Coomes, Ill.-Chicago	Sr	9	24	41	58.5
10.	Jarmica Reese, Air Force	Sr	5	21	36	58.3

#### Free-throw percentage

Rk.	Name, school	Cl.	G	FT	FTA	Pct.
1.	Kevin Ault, SW Missouri St.	So	8	20	20	100.0
	Matt Sundblad, Lamar	Jr	5	31	31	100.0
	Dionte' Harvey, Southern	Jr	4	12	12	100.0
4.	Anthony Davis, Hofstra	Jr	9	26	27	96.3
5.	Andrae Patterson, Indiana	Sr	9	25	26	96.2
6.	Kevin Worley, Canisius	Jr	7	23	24	95.8
7.	Scott Cross, Texas Arlington	Sr	7	18	19	94.7
8.	Nate Holmstadt, Montana St.	Jr	7	35	37	94.6
9.	Louis Bullock, Michigan	Jr	8	31	33	93.9
10.	Marcus Wilson, Evansville	Jr	9	30	32	93.8

#### Assists

Rk.	Name, school	Cl.	G	No.	Avg.
1.	Doug Gottlieb, Oklahoma St.	So	7	60	8.6
	Ahlon Lewis, Arizona St.	Sr	9	77	8.6
3.	Kenny Brunner, Georgetown	Fr	6	51	8.5
4.	Lonnie Cooper, Louisiana Tech	Jr	6	48	8.0
5.	Ali Ton, Davidson	Jr	7	55	7.9
6.	Jason Williams, Florida	Jr	6	47	7.8
	Anthony Carter, Hawaii	Sr	5	39	7.8
8.	Donminic Ellison, New Mexico St.	Sr	7	54	7.7
	Melvin Drake, Virginia Commonwealth	Sr	6	46	7.7
10.	Prince Fowler, TCU	Jr	9	67	7.4



TOM EWART / AP

At a spindly 6-9 and 205 pounds, Arkansas' Nick Davis has been a surprising presence inside, averaging 13.4 rebounds (third in the country) and 11.9 points this season.



BRUCE L. SCHWARTZMAN

Northwestern's Evan Eschmeyer, a 6-11, 240-pound senior center, could be the first Big Ten player taken in the NBA draft. He ranks fourth in the nation in rebounding at 12.7 per game, 4.6 more a game than last season when he made the All-Big Ten first team. He also has lifted his scoring average by eight to 22.0. Eschmeyer is in his third college season after missing two with injuries. Should he apply for a fourth year, he could join the 84 players who have reached the 2,000-point, 1,000-rebound plateau, provided he increased his scoring by 2.9 points per game.

**ESCHMEYER: Averaging a double-double.**

The top five scorers to reach the 2,000/1,000 plateau.

Player	team	Ht.	Last yr.	Yrs.	G	Pts.	Rebs.
Lionel Simmons	La Salle	6-7	1990	4	131	3,217	1,429
Harry Kelly	Texas Southern	6-7	1983	4	110	3,066	1,085
Oscar Robertson	Cincinnati	6-5	1960	3	88	2,973	1,338
Danny Manning	Kansas	6-10	1988	4	147	2,951	1,187
Elvin Hayes	Houston	6-8	1968	3	93	2,884	1,602

#### Steals

Rk.	Name, school	Cl.	G	No.	Avg.
1.	Juan Sanchez, Temple	So	7	29	4.1
2.	Kenny Brunner, Georgetown	Fr	6	24	4.0
3.	Issiah Francis, LIU-Brooklyn	Jr	9	35	3.9
	Mike Jones, Texas Christian	Sr	9	35	3.9
	Damian Owens, West Va.	Sr	8	31	3.9
	John Thomas, St. Francis (N.Y.)	Sr	7	27	3.9
7.	Bonzi Wells, Ball St.	Sr	8	30	3.8
8.	Todd Burgan, Syracuse	Sr	7	26	3.7
	Robert Kiser, Toledo	Jr	6	22	3.7
10.	Karim Scott, Eastern Wash.	Sr	7	25	3.6

#### Blocks

Rk.	Name, school	Cl.	G	No.	Avg.
1.	Jerome James, Florida A&M	Fr	7	38	5.4
2.	Alvin Jones, Georgia Tech	Fr	7	37	5.3
3.	Brian Skinner, Baylor	Sr	8	40	5.0
	Calvin Booth, Penn St.	Jr	7	35	5.0
5.	Avondre Jones, Fresno St.	Sr	6	24	4.0
6.	Antonio Reynolds-Dean, Rhode Island	Jr	6	22	3.7
7.	Caswell Cyrus, St. Bonaventure	So	8	28	3.5
8.	Cal Bowdler, Old Dominion	Jr	7	24	3.4
9.	Mike Batiste, Arizona St.	Jr	9	29	3.2
	Kirill Misychenko, Citadel	Sr	9	29	3.2

## Team

#### Scoring offense

Rk.	Team	G	W-L	Pts.	Avg.
1.	Texas Christian	9	9-0	1032	114.7
2.	LIU-Brooklyn	9	4-5	931	103.4
3.	Arizona	9	7-2	844	93.8
4.	Xavier	7	6-1	651	93.0
5.	Southeastern Louisiana	8	4-4	740	92.5
6.	Duke	10	9-1	922	92.2
7.	Arkansas	7	7-0	645	92.1
8.	West Virginia	8	7-1	736	92.0
9.	Purdue	10	8-2	898	89.8
10.	Murray St.	7	7-0	625	89.3

#### Scoring defense

Rk.	Team	G	W-L	Pts.	Avg.
1.	Princeton	8	7-1	382	47.8
2.	South Alabama	4	2-2	199	49.8
3.	College of Charleston	5	4-1	260	52.0
4.	Northeastern	4	3-1	220	55.0
5.	North Carolina St.	7	5-2	386	55.1
6.	Utah	9	9-0	498	55.3
	Northwestern	6	5-1	332	55.3
8.	Temple	7	6-1	389	55.6
9.	Bradley	7	4-3	394	56.3
	DePaul	7	3-4	394	56.3

## Individual

#### Scoring

Rk.	Name, school	Cl.	G	FG	3FG	FT	Pts.	Avg.
1.	Cindy Blodgett, Maine	Sr	5	49	14	39	151	30.2
2.	Allison Feaster, Harvard	Sr	8	82	17	52	233	29.1
3.	Amy O'Brien, Holy Cross	Jr	8	86	3	46	221	27.6
4.	Tamika Whitmore, Memphis	Jr	5	55	1	22	133	26.6
5.	A. Behrenbrinker, A. Peay	Sr	5	46	6	32	130	26.0

#### Rebounding

Rk.	Name, school	Cl.	G	No.	Avg.
1.	Mercy Aghedo, St. Peter's	So	5	80	16.0
2.	Nyree Roberts, Old Dominion	Sr	8	114	14.3
3.	Mfon Udoka, DePaul	Sr	5	70	14.0
4.	Murriel Page, Florida	Sr	8	108	13.5
5.	Simone Adams, Coppin State	So	4	51	12.8

#### Steals

Rk.	Name, school	Cl.	G	No.	Avg.
1.	Rosalyn Spann, Jackson St.	Sr	7	42	6.0
2.	Ticha Penicheiro, Old Dominion	Sr	8	40	5.0
3.	Yonka Moses, Florida Atlantic	Jr	3	14	4.7
4.	Nani Cockett, Hawaii	Sr	7	31	4.4
5.	Shniece Perry, Towson	So	7	31	4.4

#### Assists

Rk.	Name, school	Cl.	G	No.	Avg.
1.	Dalma Ivanyi, Florida International	Jr	5	47	9.4
2.	Alli Bills, Utah	Sr	7	59	8.4
3.	Gina Graziani, Miami (Fla.)	So	6	50	8.3
4.	Keisha Cox, Drake	Sr	7	58	8.3
5.	Ashley Smith, Vanderbilt	Fr	7	57	8.1

## WOMEN

### Team

#### Scoring offense

Rk.	Team	G	W-L	Pts.	Avg.
1.	Jackson St.	7	6-1	632	90.3
2.	Arizona	5	5-0	444	88.8
3.	Baylor	7	5-2	599	85.6
4.	Wisconsin	7	7-0	598	85.4
5.	Colorado St.	8	8-0	682	85.3
6.	Tennessee	10	10-0	841	84.1
7.	Alabama	7	5-2	581	83.0
8.	Drake	7	4-3	580	82.9
9.	Northern Iowa	7	6-1	580	82.9
10.	Southwest Mo. St.	7	7-0	580	82.9

#### Scoring defense

Rk.	Team	G	W-L	Pts.	Avg.
1.	New Mexico	10	9-1	500	50.0
2.	Texas-San Antonio	7	5-2	356	50.9
3.	Connecticut	9	9-0	469	52.1
4.	Utah	7	7-0	368	52.6
5.	Auburn	6	5-1	318	53.0
6.	Texas-Arlington	7	4-3	373	53.3
7.	Tulane	7	6-1	373	53.3
8.	Rice	8	6-2	429	53.6
9.	Texas Tech	6	5-1	323	53.8
10.	Tennessee	10	10-0	541	54.1



Peter Schmuck

## Padres improve to compete in the N.L.'s wild West

**P**itching is everything. This is not a new concept, of course, but every once in a while a team gets an unexpected refresher course in the importance of pitching depth. *Good*

pitching depth.

The Padres were that team in 1997. They won the N.L. West title in '96, largely because they had a pitching staff to compare and compete with the traditionally pitching-rich Dodgers. But that staff didn't hold up last season, and the frustrated Friars fell all the way to the bottom of the division standings.

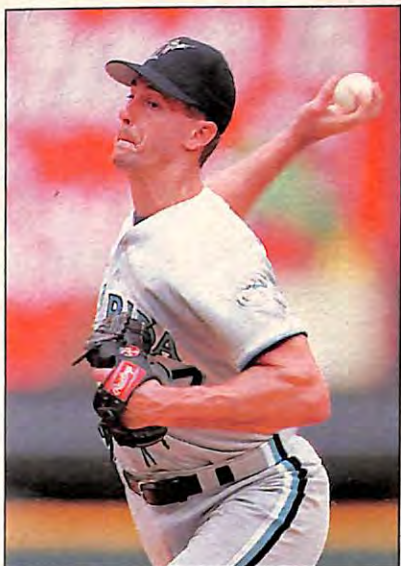
The numbers tell the story. The Padres ranked third in the N.L. with a 3.72 team ERA in '96, but dropped to 13th in the league when a combination of pitching injuries and poor performances inflated that number to 4.98 this year.

Club president Larry Lucchino and G.M. Kevin Towers knew they would have to act decisively this winter to boost the team back into contention, and they have made a series of pitching moves the past few weeks that should have a positive impact on the team's 1998 playoff aspirations.

Towers recently acquired lefthanded reliever Ed Vosberg from the defending world champion Marlins and invited Mexican League star Roberto Ramirez to compete for the other lefthanded middle relief role. Then Towers completed a bigger deal with the disintegrating Marlins, acquiring pitching ace Kevin Brown to upgrade the starting rotation.

Brown did not come cheap. The Padres gave up three prospects, two of whom—pitcher Rafael Medina and first baseman Derrek Lee—are expected to be good players. They traded several years of the future for the one year remaining on Brown's contract, but it's more complicated than that.

The organization is trying to sell the San Diego area on a new stadium, and the vote comes next fall. Has it done enough to carry the Padres



**KEVIN SENT:** Brown gives the Padres an instant ace and a proven winner.

convince fans the Padres deserve a new home.

If Lucchino's record is any indication, they won't be sorry. He played a major role in the construction of Oriole Park at Camden Yards, and figures to settle for nothing less than a park that is the jewel of baseball's Pacific Rim.

### Try anything

Minnesota is not going to let go of the Twins without a fight. The Metropolitan Sports Facilities Commission is fighting an attempt by the club to exercise an escape clause in its Metrodome lease.

Lawyers hope to block a proposed franchise shift to North Carolina by showing that the Twins contributed to the adverse economic conditions they have cited in breaking their lease.

The team can trigger an escape clause if attendance falls short of the A.L. average for three straight years and the club can show it has been losing money over that period. No one can argue either point, but the stadium authority may argue that the Twins—and Major League Baseball—created the poor economic environment with the hard-line labor policy that disrupted the industry in 1994 and '95 and should not be allowed to take advantage of it to vacate the Metrodome.

back to the top of the standings? Maybe not, but the combination of an upgraded pitching staff and a healthy starting lineup figures to put them back in contention.

Trouble is, the defending division-champion Giants have been working hard to stay on top. The Rockies have improved as well with the signing of Darryl Kile, and the Dodgers have done enough fine-tuning to position themselves for their annual run. Even the Diamondbacks have enough talent to make things interesting.

No doubt, a division title would make a new stadium a much easier sell in San Diego, but a four-team September run to the wire might

### Out of control

The huge contract the Red Sox gave to Pedro Martinez has created a ripple effect being felt all over baseball.

Dodgers outfielder Raul Mondesi recently told a newspaper in his native Dominican Republic he deserves a six-year deal worth more than \$60 million, and there's speculation teammate Mike Piazza will soon become baseball's highest-paid player.

No wonder owners were so willing a few years ago to guarantee the players \$1 billion in aggregate salary for a hard salary cap. No wonder the Players Association was so unwilling to accept it. Do we hear \$2 billion?

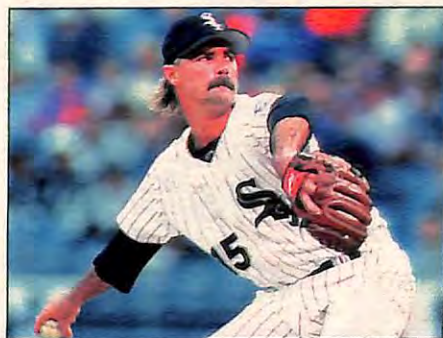
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## inside dish

FRONT OFFICE RUMBLINGS AND LOCKER ROOM WHISPERS

Jim Leyland is putting up a brave front while the front office pulls a world championship team out from under him. "I learned you deal with what you have and not with what you don't have," Leyland says. "And sometimes what you do have is still pretty good." That's a nice thought, but it isn't going to take Marlins fans long to see what they don't have—a competitive team.

The arrival of veterans Doug Drabek, Joe Carter and Norm Charlton has given the Orioles a decidedly grown-up appearance, so much that *Baltimore Sun* beat writer Joe Strauss pointed out the team might have to change the name of its stadium from Oriole Park to Jurassic Park. It's no joke. If Charlton makes the team (he signed a split contract), the Orioles will have seven players over 35 and four more veterans in the final year of contracts. The O's have an excellent chance to repeat as A.L. East champions in '98, but



**GRAY AREA:** Drabek joins an Orioles team that is talented but aging fast.

after that, who knows.

For all practical purposes, the Angels and Cardinals have pulled off a coaching trade. The Cardinals hired former Angels coach Dave Parker and the Angels responded by hiring former St. Louis hitting instructor George Hendrick. It's not unfamiliar territory for Hendrick. He played for the Angels in the mid-'80s. ... Reliever Rod Beck is still out there. He's looking for a four-year contract worth \$22.5 million—the same money Roberto Hernandez got from the Devil Rays—but it doesn't appear as if there are a lot of teams that still have that kind of money to spend.

# Astros



**REPLACING KILE:** G.M. Gerry Hunsicker is having a difficult time finding a pitcher to plug into a rotation that lost ace **Darryl Kile** to free agency. Hunsicker was looking at veteran **Doug Drabek**, but the Orioles signed the 35-year-old righthander for \$1.8 million plus incentives. "We were talking half of that," Hunsicker says. "When you're trying to spend \$500,000 on a starting pitcher, you're not going to come up with anybody with great credentials." ... There's concern about **Chris Holt**, the team's No. 3 starter who is recovering from arthroscopic rotator cuff surgery. "He might be behind the first couple of weeks of spring training," Hunsicker says. "We're optimistic he'll start the season on time."

**READY ROOKIES:** Two rookies seem ready to make the pitching staff this spring—lefthander **John Halama** and righthander **Jose Cabrera**. Halama is projected for the starting rotation, but scouts aren't certain he has a big-league arm. Cabrera could be a bullpen ace. He had a 1.17 ERA in 12 relief appearances last season. Hunsicker says another rookie with a chance to make the staff is lefthander **C.J. Nitkowski**. ... The Marlins acquired righthander **Mark Johnson** from the Astros, completing the **Moises Alou** trade. —Alan Truex

# Cardinals



**MERCKY WATERS:** As insurance for the expected loss of righthander **Andy Benes** in a contract dispute, the team signed free-agent lefthander **Kent Mercker** to a two-year deal that includes a player option for 2000. Mercker reportedly will make \$5.5 million in guaranteed money. Mercker, 29, was 8-11 with a 3.92 ERA last season for the Reds. But Cincinnati scored just 3.1 runs per Mercker start, 2.76 while he was in the game—the lowest figure in the league. In 13 of Mercker's 25 starts, the Reds scored two or fewer runs, and he was shut out twice. Given that the owners' Player Relations Committee already has voided the Benes contract once, G.M. **Walt Jocketty**, fearing the worst, says, "Quite honestly, the only solution I see is May 1." If the contract is voided, Benes would not be allowed to re-sign with the team until that date.

**DEJA VU?** The next player to sign could be former Cardinals star **Vince Coleman**. Coleman, 36, has assured the team he is in playing shape and he could be a fifth outfielder candidate, especially if he is willing to take minimum salary (\$170,000) with considerable incentives. Coleman stole 572 bases for the Cardinals from 1985-90. —Rick Hummel

# Diamondbacks



**MAN WITH A PLAN:** Since signing third baseman **Matt Williams** and shortstop **Jay Bell** to contracts totaling \$82.75 million, managing general partner **Jerry Colangelo** has

taken quite a few hits from critics. Ironically, Yankees owner **George Steinbrenner**, who never has been a friend of low salaries, has led the charge. But after the Diamondbacks signed **Willie Blair** in early December, their 1998 payroll sat somewhere near \$21.5 million. If the \$3 million the club will pay Cleveland as part of the Williams trade is included, the figure still is below \$25 million, which would have ranked 25th in the major leagues last season. "Contrary to what many believe, we do have a plan," Colangelo says, adding, "You will not hear us casting aspersions about what other people do. We're not going to participate in that contest."

**4 IN 5:** The Diamondbacks picked up four players in last week's Rule 5 draft, including two in the major league portion of the proceedings—pitchers **Martin Sanchez** (from the Marlins) and **Ynocencio De La Cruz** (Mets). Taken in the minor league portion were infielder **Omar Lopez** (White Sox) and pitcher **James Wise** (Braves). —Pedro Gomez

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# Braves



**SMOLTZ OUT:** Following **John Smoltz's** elbow surgery, which will keep him out until mid-March, manager **Bobby Cox** indicated he expects to open the season without the righthander in the rotation. Cox says **Kevin Millwood** would replace Smoltz, and Cox would look for a fifth starter during spring training. "Somebody will win that job out of spring training," Cox says. Cox suggested **Bruce Chen**, a young lefthander added to the 40-man roster this winter, but who hasn't pitched above Class A, would be a candidate, along with another young lefthander, **Odalis Perez**. Smoltz says, "I may miss one or two starts. It all depends on how quickly I get my flexibility back."

**BRIAN POWER:** The team released outfielder **Tommy Gregg** to make room on its 40-man roster for righthander **Brian Edmondson**, who was selected from the Mets in the Rule 5 draft. Edmondson, 24, will be given a chance to win a job in the bullpen. ... The team lost two pitchers off its Class AA Greenville roster. The Orioles reclaimed righthander **Rachad Stewart**, and the Diamondbacks chose lefthander **James Wise**. With the loss of **Stewart** and the release of reliever **Joe Borowski**, the Braves have nothing to show for the **Kent Mercker** trade made two years ago. —Bill Zack



LOSS PROTECTION: St. Louis signs Mercker.

# Dodgers



**MONDESI WANTS HIS:** G.M. **Fred Claire** is facing a February deadline to sign his most valuable player, catcher **Mike Piazza**. Now he can add another name to the ultimatum

list: outfielder **Raul Mondesi**. Mondesi's agent has informed Claire that his star right fielder wants to sign a contract at least six years in length during this offseason. If not, Mondesi will take his big bat, big arm and big numbers elsewhere when he becomes eligible for free agency after the 1999 season. Claire figured he didn't have to worry about Mondesi for a couple more years, but considering the composition of the outfield right now, the Dodgers can ill afford to lose him. He is by far the team's best outfielder and is coming off the first 30-30 season in club history.

**NOMO II?** Claire has met with Japanese pitcher **Masato Yoshii**, a 32-year-old righthander who was a teammate of **Hideo Nomo** on the Kintetsu Buffaloes. Yoshii, a 14-year veteran of Japanese ball, is a free agent, but it doesn't appear likely the Dodgers will sign him. ... The Dodgers have signed righthanded pitcher **Tim Scott** and outfielder **Ricky Otero** to Class AAA contracts. Both have major league experience and will come to spring training as non-roster invitees. —Steve Springer

# Brewers



**GRISSOM CIRCUMSTANCES:** After declining interview requests for a week following the blockbuster trade that brought him over from the Indians, center fielder **Marquis**

**Grissom** finally tried on his new team's jersey last week at a news conference. Grissom dismissed reports that he was upset about the move and indicated that he would like to spend the five years remaining on his \$25 million contract—possibly the rest of his career—playing the role of the underdog in Milwaukee. "That's what my career is all about," Grissom says. ... Outfielder **Gerald Williams** was dealt to the Braves for righthander **Chad Fox**. Fox could solidify an overhauled bullpen.

**FIRST YOUNGBLOOD:** For the first time in his six years as manager, **Phil Garner** will employ a bench coach. **Joel Youngblood**, formerly of the Reds, was hired and will bring with him plenty of National League experience. ... Newly acquired righthander **Jeff Juden** and catchers **Mike Matheny** and **Jesse Levis** all agreed to contract terms. ... In the minor league portion of the Rule 5 draft, the team picked up pitcher **Nigel Alejo** from the Marlins. But the Brewers lost minor leaguers **Todd Landry**, **Josh Tyler**, **Jamie Lopiccio**, **Tony Peters**, **Antuan Bunkley** and **Nelson Cana**. —Drew Olson

# Cubs



**WISH LIST:** The team is still offering to trade **Lance Johnson** and **Doug Glanville** in an attempt to acquire a second baseman and lefthanded starter. The team hasn't given up

hope of prying loose lefthander **Al Leiter** or second baseman **Craig Counsell** from Florida. ... The team is glad it decided to pass on infielder **Wil Cordero**. Shortly after its decision, a magistrate in Puerto Rico granted a restraining order to Cordero's wife, who complained he had threatened her. Last June, Cordero had pleaded guilty to beating and threatening her.

**STRIKEOUTS GALORE:** **Henry Rodriguez** brings huge power potential to the team and Wrigley Field, but he also brings 149 strikeouts in 132 games. **Sammy Sosa** set a franchise record last season with 174 whiffs. The team hasn't had two outfielders with more than 20 homers since **Andre Dawson** hit 31 and **George Bell** had 25 in 1991. The Dominican duo of Sosa and Rodriguez has a chance to combine for 70. Lynch isn't concerned about the high strikeout totals because he believes it will be worth it. "You don't see many guys who hit home runs and don't strike out," Lynch says. "I don't have a problem with strikeouts as long as you get the power in return." —Barry Rozner

# Expos



**STAYING PUT:** **Rondell White** has seen the team dismantled around him, but he's still not ready to demand a trade. "It's going to be tough, but this is the organization that brought

me into the major leagues and gave me a contract that's allowed me to do some things for my family," he says. "I will always be thankful for that. So we'll see how the season goes. I know this, though: I don't want to lose 100 games." White is entering the third year of a five-year deal that includes a club option for 2001 and he will make \$2 million. But vice-president of baseball operations **Bill Stoneman** says White is safe. "We signed him to that deal with the idea he'd be a guy we'd build around. That hasn't changed."

**IS IT OVER?** After trading **Henry Rodriguez** to the Cubs, G.M. **Jim Beattie** says the team's firesale is over. "From this point on, anything we do will be geared toward ... adding better players," he says. ... The Expos have sent outfielder **Mark Hamlin** back to the Rockies. Hamlin, acquired in the **Mike Lansing** trade, was the player to be named in the **Dave Veres** trade. ... The Expos got righthander **Tony Armas Jr.** from Boston to complete the November 18 deal that sent **Pedro Martinez** to the Red Sox for pitcher **Carl Pavano**. —Jeff Blair

# Giants



**LAYING A FOUNDATION:** The team is borrowing a strategy devised by Indians management before Jacobs Field opened. By signing several promising young players long before their free agency years, the Tribe ensured a solid core would be in place when the stadium opened. The Indians, and the ballpark, have enjoyed great success as a result. On the day the team broke ground for its new park, which will open in April 2000, it signed pitcher **Kirk Rueter**, 27, to a three-year, \$8.5 million contract. The deal covers all three of Rueter's arbitration-eligible years. Rueter's deal comes on the heels of third baseman **Bill Mueller** signing a three-year, \$1.75 million contract. And after signing Rueter, management began working on multiyear deals for catcher **Brian Johnson** and pitcher **Shawn Estes**.

**FOCUS ON BAKER:** Now that the team is virtually set, management will concentrate on extending manager **Dusty Baker's** contract beyond the 1998 season. When the team broke ground for the new stadium, G.M. **Brian Sabean** told the 7,000 onlookers that he wanted Baker to be there when the park opens. Baker said he wouldn't mind an extension, as long as it went beyond two years. —*Henry Schulman*

# Padres



**BROWN COMES TO TOWN:** Team officials say the acquisition of Marlins ace **Kevin Brown** makes the club a contender to win the N.L. West Division next season. Brown, 32, figures to reduce the pressure on fellow starters **Andy Ashby**, **Joey Hamilton** and **Sterling Hitchcock**. The price was steep: Class AAA first baseman **Derrek Lee**, who led the Southern League in home runs two years ago; Class AAA pitcher **Rafael Medina**, who dominated the Arizona Fall League; and Class A lefthanded pitcher **Steve Hoff**. Brown, who will make \$4.8-million this season, is entering the final year of his contract. "He probably will be a very difficult sign for us after the season," Towers says. **Ken Caminiti**, **Steve Finley** and **Wally Joyner** also are entering the final years of their contracts.

**MINOR PROBLEMS:** In two months, the franchise has lost its top corner infield prospects: Class AA third baseman **Gabe Alvarez**, taken by Arizona in the expansion draft, and Lee. ... Joyner figures to get an extension to stabilize the first base job, and the club would like to retain Caminiti through the decade. ... Pitcher **Pete Smith** is favored to win the No. 5 starting job after agreeing to a one-year deal. —*Tom Krasovic*

# Pirates



**ROTATION OPTIONS:** Kris Benson, the No. 1 overall pick in the 1996 draft, will have an excellent chance of taking the rotation spot **Steve Cooke** held last year. Benson, lefthander **Jimmy Anderson** and hard-throwing righthander **Jose Silva** are the contenders. Silva is the only one with major league experience. Cooke's release came as no surprise. He was on the verge of a major salary increase because of arbitration eligibility and didn't pitch well enough in the second half to justify that hike. Cooke was 2-6 with a 6.17 ERA in 14 starts after the All-Star break.

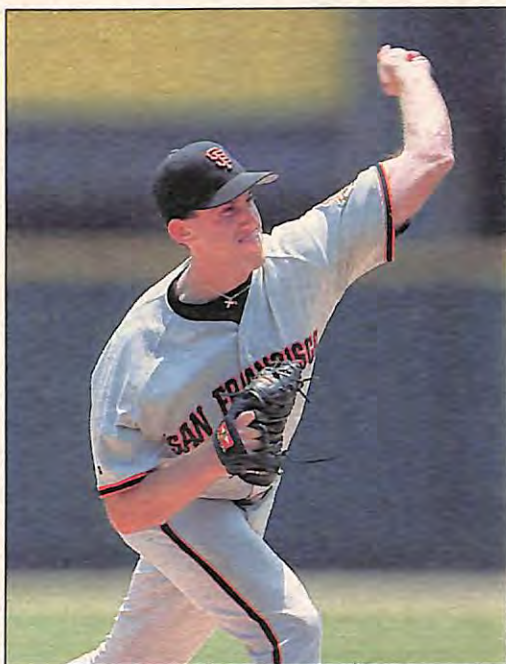
**DISCOUNT PLAN:** As usual, the club went bargain hunting in the Rule 5 draft, taking two pitchers for \$50,000 each. Righthander **Javier Martinez's** 97 mph fastball caught G.M. **Cam Bonifay's** eye during a scouting trip to the Puerto Rican Winter League. The other choice was **Melvin Brazoban**, a righthander from the Texas system. Brazoban, 20, is more of a long shot. His only pro experience has been at the rookie league level. The team has openings in middle relief. ... No one wanted **Turner Ward** at this time a year ago. Now he has a two-year deal and a chance to win at least a share of the Pirates' center field job. —*John Mehno*

# Marlins



**SLICE, SLICE:** The budget cuts continued with the trading of **Kevin Brown** to the Padres and **Dennis Cook** to the Mets. As of last week, the club had lopped \$24.7 million off its scheduled 1998 payroll. For Brown, the club received first baseman **Derrek Lee**, righthander **Rafael Medina** and lefthander **Steve Hoff**. Lee, the Padres' first draft pick in 1993, hit 34 homers at the Class AA level in 1996 but struggled to drive the ball last season in San Diego (.259, 1 HR, 54 at-bats). Still, he could be the everyday first baseman. Medina, 22, who has less than a year of experience at Class AAA, could move into the rotation, which will be extremely thin once the club trades lefthander **Al Leiter**. G.M. **Dave Dombrowski** says the team won't lack quality arms next year, but he acknowledges it will lack experience. Hoff will start the season in high Class A or Class AA.

**MORE PROSPECTS:** For Cook, the team received two minor leaguers—23-year-old outfielder **Fletcher Bates** (.257, 12 HR at Class AA) and 20-year-old lefthander **Scott Comer** (7-1, 1.74 ERA in short-season Class A). ... Dombrowski expects **Gary Sheffield** and **Bobby Bonilla** to remain with the team in 1998. Their contracts have made them difficult to trade. —*Dan Graziano*



LOCKED UP: Rueter won 13 games last season.

# Reds



**PICKING UP THE PIECES:** The team's hopes for '98 suffered a severe blow, albeit an expected one, when free-agent starting pitchers **Mike Morgan** and **Kent Mercker** signed elsewhere. Each had been offered arbitration with the hope some creative contract restructuring would keep them in Cincinnati. But Mercker left for the Cardinals, Morgan left for the Twins and the team was left scrounging for anyone who can round out the rotation. All that is left is **Brett Tomko**, **Dave Burba**, converted reliever **Mike Remlinger** and a number of unproven and/or inexperienced hopefuls.

**ANOTHER BLOW:** Scouting director **Julian Mock**, who served 21 years as a scout before ascending to his current directorship in 1990, announced he is leaving to seek another opportunity—apparently a lesser job with another organization that will pay more. This has become a recurring problem for the Reds, whose pay scale is notoriously low. Baseball front offices are loaded with former organization members. Losing Mock is not a good sign. The organization appeared on the upswing after signing a half-dozen Latin American prospects in a renewed effort to become more international. —*Mike Bass*

# Mets



**LEFTHANDED COMPLEMENT:** In dealing two minor league players—outfielder **Fletcher Bates** and lefthander **Scott Comer**—to the Marlins, the Mets got lefthander **Dennis Cook**, who should be an asset in the middle to late innings. The addition of Cook reduces the team's reliance on righthanders **Mel Rojas** and **Greg McMichael** to get lefthanded batters out. Lefthanders batted .256 against Cook last year; they batted .335 against the six lefthanded pitchers the Mets used in relief. The problem is that the bullpen is becoming crowded—it includes Cook, Rojas, McMichael, **John Franco**, **Turk Wendell**, **Derek Wallace** and **Hector Mercado**, the lefthanded minor leaguer obtained from the Phillies for righthander **Mike Welch** last week. So look for G.M. **Steve Phillips** to offer a reliever in a trade.

**IMPORTING HELP:** The team signed **Jae Weong Seo**, a 20-year-old pitcher from Korea, and said he probably will begin next spring at the Class A level. Phillips says the righthander has the potential "to be at the front end of our starting rotation" eventually and could make an impact by 2000. ... The team lost minor league pitchers **Brian Edmondson** (Braves) and **Ynocencio De La Cruz** (Diamondbacks) in the Rule 5 draft. —*Marty Noble*

# Phillies



**STOCKING THE 'PEN:** The club took steps to strengthen its bullpen by acquiring righthander **Mike Welch** from the Mets and re-signing **Billy Brewer** as a non-roster spring training invitee.

With the second pick in the Rule 5 free-agent draft, the Phillies picked lefthander **Hector Mercado** from Florida's system. Mercado was then traded to the Mets for Welch, 25. In 1997, Welch was 2-2 with a 3.66 ERA and 20 saves at Class AAA Norfolk. "He throws the ball over the plate, so it's really not much of a gamble," manager **Terry Francona** says. "We'll throw him into the (bullpen) mix." ... The team reacquired lefthander **Larry Wimberly** from Boston in the Rule 5 draft. Wimberly was a rising star at the Class A level in the Phillies' system before he was traded to the Red Sox in 1996.

**A KEEPER:** Brewer, 29, was a pleasant surprise after joining the team in June. He made 25 appearances as a situational lefty, going 1-2 with a 3.27 ERA before a strained elbow ended his season. Because the team lost lefty **Ryan Karp** in the expansion draft, Brewer's return was critical. ... The club is interested in acquiring **Alex Arias**, who played for Florida the last five years, as a backup for shortstop **Desi Relaford**. —*Chris Edwards*

# Rockies



**DANTE'S PIQUE:** Dante Bichette has to be thrilled about the **Darryl Kile** signing. Nearly every time the team faced Kile, Bichette found himself on the bench—a victim of Kile's

nasty curveball that he never found a way to hit. "Now Dante will get to play," manager **Don Baylor** says. "There are days when he wouldn't play against certain pitchers, and Darryl Kile was one of them. Now he'll be driving in runs for Darryl Kile." ... General manager **Bob Gebhard** is trying to sign **Mike Lansing** and **Pedro Astacio** to long-term contracts. Both are eligible for free agency after next season.

**JAYHAWK FLIES:** Jayhawk Owens, penciled in as the starting catcher only two springs ago, has left the team. He signed as a six-year minor league free agent with Minnesota, the organization from which the Rockies had plucked him in the expansion draft. Owens suffered a broken thumb late that spring, struggled upon his return and spent last season at the Class AAA level after **Kirt Manwaring** was signed. ... The front office disputes recent payroll numbers released by the Players Association. The team topped \$46 million in salaries last season, or about \$5 million more than the Players Association numbers indicate. —*Tony DeMarco*

# Angels



**HIT THE ROAD:** They played prominent roles in the team's surprising second-place finish in the A.L. West, but that didn't prevent infielders **Luis Alicea** and **Jack Howell** from being discarded. Neither Alicea, who replaced the injured **Randy Velarde** and hit .253, nor Howell, a utility player who hit .259 with 14 homers, was offered arbitration. And it took only two days for both to hook on with other teams. Alicea signed a two-year, \$1.5 million deal with the Rangers and Howell signed a two-year, \$1.05 million deal with the Astros. Without Howell, manager **Terry Collins** might experience difficulty when he wants a lefthanded pinch hitter late in games. G.M. **Bill Bavasi** says the Angels tried to hammer out deals with Alicea and Howell, but the team wouldn't commit to anything beyond 1998. Alicea wanted a starter's salary, but with Velarde scheduled to return from elbow surgery, the team couldn't guarantee him a starting job.

**DEALIN' FOR DUNCAN:** Having failed to sign infielder **Bip Roberts**, the Angels have apparently set their sights on free agent **Mariano Duncan**, a utility player who could start at second base should Velarde have elbow problems. ... The Angels hired former major league outfielder **George Hendrick** as first base coach and former shortstop **Garry Templeton** to manage the Class A team at Cedar Rapids. —Mike DiGiovanna

# Blue Jays



**THE SARGE IS IN CHARGE:** Gary Matthews, nicknamed "Sarge" during his playing days, spent the past three seasons putting minor league hitters through the drills in the Cubs' system. Now he takes on Toronto's woebegone offense as the hitting instructor on rookie manager **Tim Johnson's** staff. Last season, the team hit .244 and scored 654 runs, last in the league on both counts. The club also struck out 7.02 times per game while outperforming only two clubs. One thing Matthews will emphasize is unselfishness at the plate. "If there's a guy on second base, you obviously want to drive him in, but getting him over to third is just as important," Matthews says. "I want to see guys in the dugout high-fiving (hitters) for doing that."

**CROWDED OUTFIELD?** If the Jays are serious about keeping Rule 5 draftee **Luis Saturria** on the roster through the '98 season, then **Robert Perez** is in jeopardy of being returned to the minors. G.M. **Gord Ash** wants to sign a veteran fourth outfielder, and the numbers suggest a sixth outfielder can't make the team. Perez spent the entire season in former manager **Cito Gaston's** doghouse. Saturria, 21, hit .274 with 23 steals (and 24 assists) for Class A Peoria last season. He must be kept on the major league roster through the '98 season or be offered back to the Cardinals for \$25,000. —Tom Maloney

# Indians



**SETTLING FOR LESS?** When the team dangled a multiyear contract in front of **Travis Fryman**, it didn't take him long to grab it. Fryman was so eager about it, he even agreed to take a pay cut. Security was more important for Fryman than taking a shot at free agency, which he could have done after next season. Had Fryman not agreed to the contract, he probably would have been traded for the third time since the end of last season, and the team would have gone after **Dean Palmer**.

**CUTTING CORNERS:** Signing Fryman pushes the team's payroll close to \$60 million. That eliminates the possibility of trading for **Chuck Knoblauch** or **Roberto Alomar**, leaving rookie **Enrique Wilson** as the leading candidate to play second. Wilson, a natural shortstop, played second at Class AAA Buffalo last season. The team was talking with veterans **Shawon Dunston** and **Rey Sanchez**, who could challenge for the starting job or serve as insurance if Wilson falters. **Jeff Branson** will return and battle for a backup spot. **Chad Fonville**, claimed off waivers from the White Sox, is another reserve possibility. ... Catcher **Pat Borders** and utilityman **Jeff Manto** signed minor league contracts and will be invited to spring training. Borders, who would back up **Sandy Alomar Jr.**, hit a career-high .297 last season. Manto hit .267 with two homers and seven RBIs in 16 games last season. —Steve Herrick

# Athletics



**BLOWING INTO TOWN:** The team solved one of its most pressing needs when it signed free agent **Mike Blowers**. He'll take over third base from **Scott Brosius**, who was dealt to the Yankees in the **Kenny Rogers** trade. Blowers has had success, but for some reason he didn't perform well in 1997 and was available in the club's price range. Blowers, who will balance a predominantly lefthanded-hitting lineup, has been bothered by injuries the last two years, but he checked out with team doctors.

**WHAT A RELIEF:** The front office avoided arbitration with reliever **Mike Mohler**, signing the lefthander to a one-year deal. Mohler was 1-10 with a 5.13 ERA, but he was effective after moving from the rotation to the bullpen. He was 1-3 with a 3.21 ERA in 52 relief appearances and will remain in that role in 1998. The remaining arbitration-eligible players are relievers **Billy Taylor** and **Buddy Groom** and infielder **Rafael Bournival**. ... The organization used the first choice in the Rule 5 draft on Cubs pitcher **Javier Martinez**, but the Pirates showed interest and Martinez was shipped east in a cash deal. It had been believed the front office would use the Rule 5 draft to upgrade the roster. ... In the Class AA draft, the team took second baseman **Frank Menechino** from the White Sox. In the Class A draft, righthander **Jason Berry** (Orioles) and catcher **Joshua Davis** (Padres) were tabbed. —David Bush



RBIs, MAN: Carter's designated assignment.

# Mariners



**EMPTY SPOTS:** The nucleus of the division champions will return, but the turnover includes first baseman **Paul Sorrento**, left fielder **Roberto Kelly**, utility infielder **Mike Blowers** and pitchers **Omar Olivares** and **Norm Charlton**. Losing righthander **Derek Lowe** and former No. 1 pick **Jason Varitek**, a catcher, to the Red Sox and getting little in return (**Heathcliff Slocumb**) puts another blemish on **Woody Woodward's** GM track record. ... Woodward has been unable or unwilling to trade **Randy Johnson**, who is entering the final year of his contract and apparently won't be offered an extension. The Red Sox's recent signing of **Pedro Martinez** for \$75 million only increases Johnson's value, and it didn't help matters when the Marlins traded **Kevin Brown** to San Diego for a couple of unknowns. However, manager **Lou Piniella** says having Johnson as his opening day starter isn't so bad, though Johnson's status still might change before camp.

**EXPERIENCED:** The starting rotation could include three 35-year-olds (Johnson, **Jeff Fassero** and **Jamie Moyer**), and the bullpen could have one 40-year-old. Lefthanded reliever **Tony Fossas**, 40, signed a one-year contract last week for \$700,000. ... The team plucked **Jeff Huson** from the Rockies organization in the Rule 5 draft and signed free agent **Pat Listach** for \$425,000. Huson and Listach will compete for the utility infield spot during spring training. —Jim Street

# Devil Rays



**NO MORE COACHING:** Milt Thompson decided to put his coaching career on hold in an attempt to resume his playing career. Thompson, 38, had been the minor league roving outfield/baserunning instructor since joining the team in October 1996. He played parts of 13 seasons in the majors but was released by Colorado in August '96. "I'll be 39 in January, and I know it's going to be tough," Thompson says. "... If it doesn't work out at least I know I gave it a try." Thompson has sent letters to a number of teams seeking an invitation to camp. He doesn't expect to talk with the Devil Rays.

**THE INJURY REPORT:** Top lefthanded pitching prospect **Bobby Seay** is expected to miss the start of spring training after having surgery to repair a hole in his intestine and remove his appendix. ... Lefthander **Ryan Karp**, the team's 27th pick in the expansion draft, was designated for assignment but might re-sign as a free agent. ... The team selected three players in the minor league portion of the Rule 5 draft—infielder **Alex Llanos** and outfielders **Garrett Butler** and **Jose Velazquez**—and lost two pitchers—**Matt Williams** and **Jason Berry**. ... G.M. **Chuck LaMar** was excited over the hiring of sports psychologist **Harvey Dorfman**. "He'll be here to help the players when we or they feel they need some type of help," LaMar says. "He has an expertise in maximizing performance." —Marc Topkin

# Orioles



**NO-RISK DEAL:** Reliever **Norm Charlton** has agreed to a split contract and will compete for a middle-relief role. The lefthander, who is coming off a difficult season (7.27 ERA in 71 appearances with the Mariners), joins a bullpen that recently lost closer **Randy Myers**. The opportunity might be there for Charlton to re-establish himself as a quality stopper if the new closer combination of **Armando Benitez** and **Arthur Rhodes** fails to pan out. Conversely, if Benitez and Rhodes fill the role capably, Charlton could replace Rhodes as the lefthanded workhorse in the middle innings. The signing wasn't a major gamble for the club, which guaranteed Charlton only \$350,000 but would have to increase that to \$650,000 if he makes the major league roster.

**THE RIGHT SIDE:** Joe Carter, another modestly priced free-agent acquisition, is ticketed to replace **Geronimo Berroa** as the righthanded designated hitter. Carter has topped the 100-RBI mark in eight of the past nine seasons. The team still has the option of offering the free-swinging Berroa salary arbitration in January, but it probably will allow him to become a free agent. **Harold Baines** figures to be the lefthanded DH. Any remaining DH at-bats will go to **Eric Davis** or **Jeffrey Hammonds**. ... The club did not pick a player—or lose one—in the Rule 5 draft. —Peter Schmuch

# Rangers



**A WANTED MAN:** The club didn't deem outfielder Warren Newson valuable enough to sign to a major league contract—but it still wanted him in the organization. So, it signed Newson, righthander Terry Clark and outfielder Les Norman to Class AAA contracts and invited them to spring training. Newson, who missed the last five weeks of the 1997 season because of a ruptured tendon in his right biceps, has become an all-or-nothing hitter. He slugged 10 home runs for the team last season in only 169 at-bats but struck out 53 times. Clark made nine starts and four relief appearances for the club and lost seven of eight decisions. Norman, who saw limited duty with the Royals in 1995 and 1996, hit 17 homers for the Indians' Class AAA Buffalo affiliate.

**BACK TO JAPAN:** The club has sold righthander Keiichi Kojima's contract to the Chunichi Dragons of the Japanese Central League. In his first year of pro ball in the United States, Kojima was hammered at Class AA Tulsa (1-8 record and an 8.83 ERA) but pitched effectively at Class A Charlotte (1.73 ERA in 11 games). ... The team avoided arbitration with infielder Domingo Cedenio, signing him to a one-year contract for \$500,000 (nearly double his '97 salary). Cedenio was a pleasant surprise last season, batting .282 in 365 at-bats. —Kevin Lonnquist

# Royals



**ROYAL PALMER:** The team completed a minor coup by luring third baseman Dean Palmer back for 1998, with a player option for '99. But the signing of Palmer cost it a chance to sign either Chili Davis or Joe Carter, both of whom are 37-year-old designated hitters. One reason for the move was that the Royals were more interested in bringing back a younger position player than an older DH. Palmer, who will turn 29 Saturday, has been one of the most productive home run-hitting third basemen during his career.

**LEFTHANDED PROTECTION:** The team is looking for a lefthanded DH to protect a predominantly righthanded-hitting lineup. Bob Hamelin, the 1994 A.L. Rookie of the Year in his first full stint in the majors with the Royals, is a possibility. Hamelin, 30, injected some life into his stalled career in '97 with the Tigers, but he recently was designated for assignment. The team also is looking at Darren Daulton, who might retire, and Hal Morris. ... Manager Tony Muser says his spring focus will be improving fundamentals. One of the team's biggest problems last season was not doing the little things well enough, like running bases, hitting the cutoff man or moving runners. Muser says the approach is a way to get the team back to a level where it can compete consistently with its big-payroll cohorts in the A.L. Central Division. —Luciana Chavez

# Twins



**FIELDER'S CHOICE:** After adding two free agents who are a combined 76 years old, the team apparently is interested in adding some weight to its aging lineup. If Cecil Fielder is signed, as has been discussed, the Twins will field one big, old team. Outfielder Otis Nixon and starting pitcher Mike Morgan, both 38, are the latest signees. They join Paul Molitor, 41, righthander Bob Tewksbury, 37, and reliever Rick Aguilera, who will be 36 on December 31, on the club's active old-timers' unit. Fielder, only 34, hit .260 with 13 homers and 61 RBIs for the Yankees last season. Finding a spot for him might prove difficult. He could be a designated hitter, but Paul Molitor is the man there. Fielder could play first base, but young David Ortiz will be given a shot to unseat Scott Stahoviak there. But Fielder is a proven power hitter, and that's something the club desperately needs.

**STILL GOING:** Morgan was 9-12 with a 4.78 ERA last season in Cincinnati. Although he has been on the disabled list and/or rehabilitation assignments more than 10 times in his career, Morgan says he isn't concerned about his durability. He should be the third or fourth starter. ... The club gained some speed by signing Nixon to a one-year contract. Nixon, who spent most of last season with Toronto before being traded to the Dodgers in August, stole 59 bases and batted .266 with 18 doubles and 44 RBIs. —John Millea

# Red Sox



**NAEHRING PROGRESSING:** The team received a positive report on third baseman Tim Lincecum, who is recovering from elbow surgery. Naehring was left unprotected in the expansion draft, but his injury apparently scared off other clubs. Naehring's smooth rehabilitation will enable the team to trade infielder John Valentin, who moved to third after Naehring's surgery. The team cannot afford Valentin's demand of \$28 million over four years. There had been concern, though, that the team would be shorthanded in the infield if it traded Valentin and found Naehring unable to start the season. ... Jeff Frye will start at second base and be backed up by rookie Donnie Sadler. Mo Vaughn is the man at first base—if a contract is worked out—and Nomar Garciaparra is set at shortstop. ... Utilityman Jim Leyritz and rookie Arquimede Pozo are available for any shoring up that the infield might need.

**MORE PEDRO:** Among the features in Pedro Martinez's record contract is a \$17.5 million club option for 2004, a year in which Martinez will be only 32 years old on opening day. Martinez received a \$3 million signing bonus and his base salary for 1998 is \$7 million, which makes the team's goal of a \$40 million to \$45 million payroll realistic. Still, ticket prices are expected to rise. ... Roger Clemens left the club exactly 52 weeks before Martinez signed his long-term deal. —Paul Doyle



VETERAN ARM: Morgan will pitch for the Twins.

# White Sox



**FIRST THINGS FIRST:** Frank Thomas is preparing to play full time at first base, but he realizes defense is not a strong point of his game. Actually, Thomas has a good glove, but his throwing arm is lacking. In spring training, manager Jerry Manuel must decide if Thomas should play first or be the team's primary designated hitter. Last season, rookie Mario Valdez was the first baseman for most of the final month. The knock on Valdez is he lacks power, but he did hit 15 homers in 81 games at Class AAA Nashville last season, so there is potential. Thomas says he'll do what's best for the team.

**HELP WANTED:** Inexperienced lefthanders Scott Eyre and Mike Siroka are expected to be in the 1998 rotation. Both pitched well last September, but general manager Ron Schueler is looking for a veteran as insurance after righthander Doug Drabek signed with the Orioles. ... The team picked up two pitchers who were at the Class A level last season in the Rule 5 minor league draft. Righthander Joe Davenport was selected from the Blue Jays' system and lefthander Chris Ochsenscheld was acquired from the Dodgers' organization. Davenport was a closer at Hagerstown last year, recording 10 saves and a 3.68 ERA in 37 appearances. Ochsenscheld split time between Yakima and San Bernardino and was a combined 3-1 with a 3.65 ERA and four saves in 25 relief outings. —Scot Gregor

# Tigers



**BOPPED BY BIP:** Bob Hamelin was a pleasant surprise as the team's designated hitter in 1997. He was its best hitter on the road (.291 average) and his home run ratio of one per every 17.67 at-bats led the team. But because he was only a DH—he started just two games at first base, where the club will be set for years with Tony Clark—Hamelin became the odd man out when Bip Roberts was signed to a one-year contract with an option for the 1999 season. G.M. Randy Smith likes the idea of using Roberts in the outfield or infield, if needed. He doesn't provide the power of Hamelin, who was designated for assignment, but he strikes out less and is considerably faster.

**ANOTHER RIGHTHAND MAN:** The addition of free-agent pitcher Frank Castillo (12-12 with a 5.42 ERA for the Cubs and Rockies last season) gives the rotation another righthander. Brian Moehler, Scott Sanders and Castillo all are righthanders; Justin Thompson is the sole lefthander. Bryce Florie, Tim Worrell and Greg Keagle, all righthanders, are candidates for the fifth spot. Castillo was 2-0 with an 0.86 ERA in three starts against A.L. teams in interleague play. ... Bill Ripken was signed to a minor league contract, but it's a near-certainty he'll make the team. Ripken gives the team versatility. He was one of five players to play all four infield positions last season. —Tom Gage

# Yankees



**PURSING KNOBLAUCH:** The Yankees and Twins spoke recently, and, although the Twins' request in trade talks for second baseman Chuck Knoblauch remained largely

unchanged (it is believed the Twins seek a three-player package of young pitchers: Eric Milton and Ramiro Mendoza, and outfield prospect Ricky Ledee), the team still has hopes of landing Knoblauch. Says one Yankees official, "I suspect either we'll get him or Cleveland will."

**PITCHING CONCERNS:** Manager Joe Torre expressed concern about the depth of his pitching rotation, espoused a conservative outlook for the surgically repaired David Cone and spoke optimistically about Darryl Strawberry's chances of becoming his left fielder. Torre's concern about the rotation is warranted. He conceded the team can't count on Cone at the start. Without Cone, who had shoulder surgery in October, the back end of the rotation currently consists of chain-smoking gopher ball specialist Hideki Irabu, the largely untested Mendoza and a question mark. "We're a little lighter than we were last year," Torre says. His positive comments about Strawberry was the stunner since the latter has averaged only 111 at-bats the past six seasons. "If Straw is the Straw of old, even if that was for four days a week, just the threat he poses makes him play out there," Torre says. —Jon Heyman

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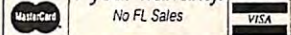
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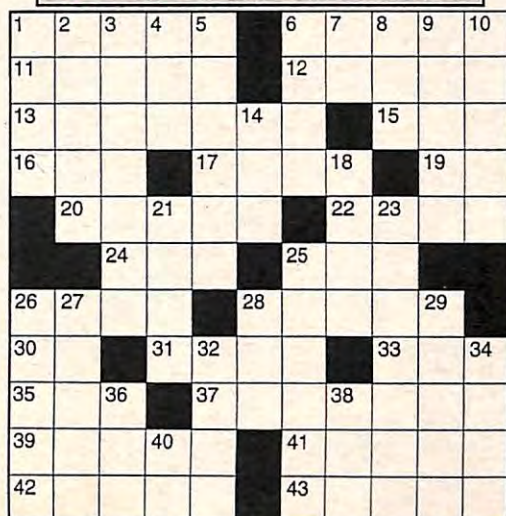
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- New York NHL skater 1925-42
- Holland
- Political campus org.
- South by west (abbr.)
- Word with hat
- Tony of tennis
- Tom of tennis
- Annoyance
- Winner's money
- The Greatest
- School bathroom
- Fetisov on ice
- Abdul-Jabbar
- Colorado center
- Stephane
- Penguins' home
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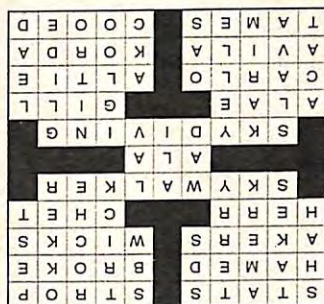


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## Dave Kindred

# 1997: sound bites and real bites

In 1997, David Letterman said to Marv Albert, "Panties, Marv? I just gotta ask, panties?"

In 1997, Mike Tyson bit off a chunk of Evander Holyfield's right ear, spit it out and came back for seconds.

In 1997, a year during which an auction bidder paid \$6,900 for Mickey Mantle's hair, 3,436 people shaved themselves Jay Buhner-bald for free tickets to a Mariners game.

John Elway saw a Denver newspaper's elaborate diagram of his ruptured biceps tendon and said, "I just hope I never get kicked in the groin."

Barry Sanders ran a mile and more around NFL tacklers. Ken Griffey Jr. and Mark McGwire hit eight miles' worth of home runs, one a McGwire missile off Cleveland's scoreboard that moved pitcher Orel Hersher to mouth the word, "Wow."

Seeing Marv's private modeling of Calvin Klein undies, Vanessa Perhach testified in 1997 that she told him, "Wow."

Earl Woods said of his son, "Tiger will do more than any other man in history to change the course of humanity," shortly before *GQ* magazine reported a series of Tiger's racist, sexist, homophobic and otherwise vulgar jokes that, had such thoughts occurred to Jesus Christ, Mahatma Gandhi and Abraham Lincoln, might have made something of those men who never once won the U.S. Amateur.

Denny McLain, the last pitcher to win 30 games, went to jail again. Steffi Graf's father, Peter, went to jail. O.J. Simpson is not in jail.

Defensive tackle Sean Gilbert sat out 1997, refusing a Redskins offer of \$3.6 million because "a revelation from God" set the divine amount at \$5 million. But kicker Nick Lowery, rather than retire, put himself on the NFL market with this advertisement: "I'm not a free agent, but I'm very affordable."

In 1997, Barry Switzer carried a loaded gun, Allen Iverson carried a loaded gun and figure skater Oksana Baiul was loaded when she crashed her Mercedes into a tree and was arrested for drunken driving, after which she said she couldn't possibly have been drunk. "I'm Russian," she explained.

Dean Smith, Eddie Robinson and Tom Osborne said goodbye to coaching, Larry Bird said hello and Bob Knight said of Indiana's new football coach, Cam Cameron, once an Indiana basketball player and later a football assistant to Bo Schembechler at Michigan, "If Cam has played for me and then worked for Schembechler and he can't succeed, then they probably just ought to shoot him."

Peter O'Malley put the Dodgers up for sale, Wayne Huizenga put the Marlins up for grabs and Charles Barkley put a citizen through a window.

A 1997 score: Marines 1, Riddick Bowe 0.

Lunatics ran asylums. Penny Hardaway told the Magic



**IN THE ROUGH:** A magazine story indicated phenom Woods is better at sizing up his shots than sizing up his fellow man.

**"The key to this whole business is sincerity. Once you can fake that, you've got it made."**

**—Monte Clark**

to fire coach Brian Hill. Latrell Sprewell choked, punched and threatened to kill P.J. Carlesimo because he didn't like the way the Warriors' coach talked to him. Here's Jazz president Frank Layden on what would happen if a player tried that with his team's coach: "Nobody fights with Jerry Sloan because you know the price would be too high. You might come out the winner. At his age (55), you might even lick him. But you'd lose an eye, an arm ... everything would be gone."

The old football coach Monte Clark said he'd finally figured out how to relate to today's athletes: "The key to this whole business is sincerity. Once you can fake that, you've got it made."

Quarterback Jim Harbaugh broke his right hand hitting a broadcaster, relief pitcher Todd Worrell broke his left hand hitting a chalkboard, quarterback Gus Frerotte sprained his neck head-butting a concrete wall and presidential golfer William Jefferson Clinton shredded his knee walking down some stairs. Meanwhile, for the 16th time in 12 years, tackle Mark Schlereth underwent knee surgery.

In 1997, the U.S. House of Representatives subcommittee on Early Childhood, Youth and Families invited Evander Holyfield to testify about his experiences as a father—testimony for which the champ is overqualified, being the father of seven children by five women, two of them his wives at the time.

When Orioles outfielder/bachelor Brady Anderson was seen holding a friend's 14-month-old child, he told a curious onlooker, "You make two straight All-Star games, they give you a baby."

The Vanderbilt football coach, Woody Widenhofer, defined the confidence his team needed: "The kind of confidence the 82-year-old man had when he married a 25-year-old woman and bought a five-bedroom house next to an elementary school."

May Ben Hogan rest in peace, along with Eddie Arcaro, Curt Flood and the singular Jack Kent Cooke who died in 1997 at age 84 after a lifetime in sports, the first baseball owner to hire Sparky Anderson as a manager, the only owner to win world championships in the NBA and NFL, a billionaire with an ego the size of his bank account who, refusing to cooperate on a book about the world's five greatest salesmen, told the author, "Sir, I am not one of five anything."

A garter belt, Marv? I just gotta ask, a garter belt?

The year's sweetest three words were spoken by Phil Niekro at his Hall of Fame induction. He said the long ceremony delayed his late father's daily baseball games with other coal miners in heaven. So Niekro finished his speech by saying, "Play ball, Dad."

**TSN**

Dave Kindred is a contributing writer for THE SPORTING NEWS.

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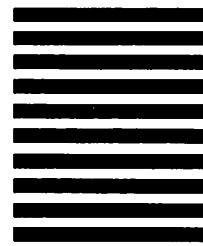
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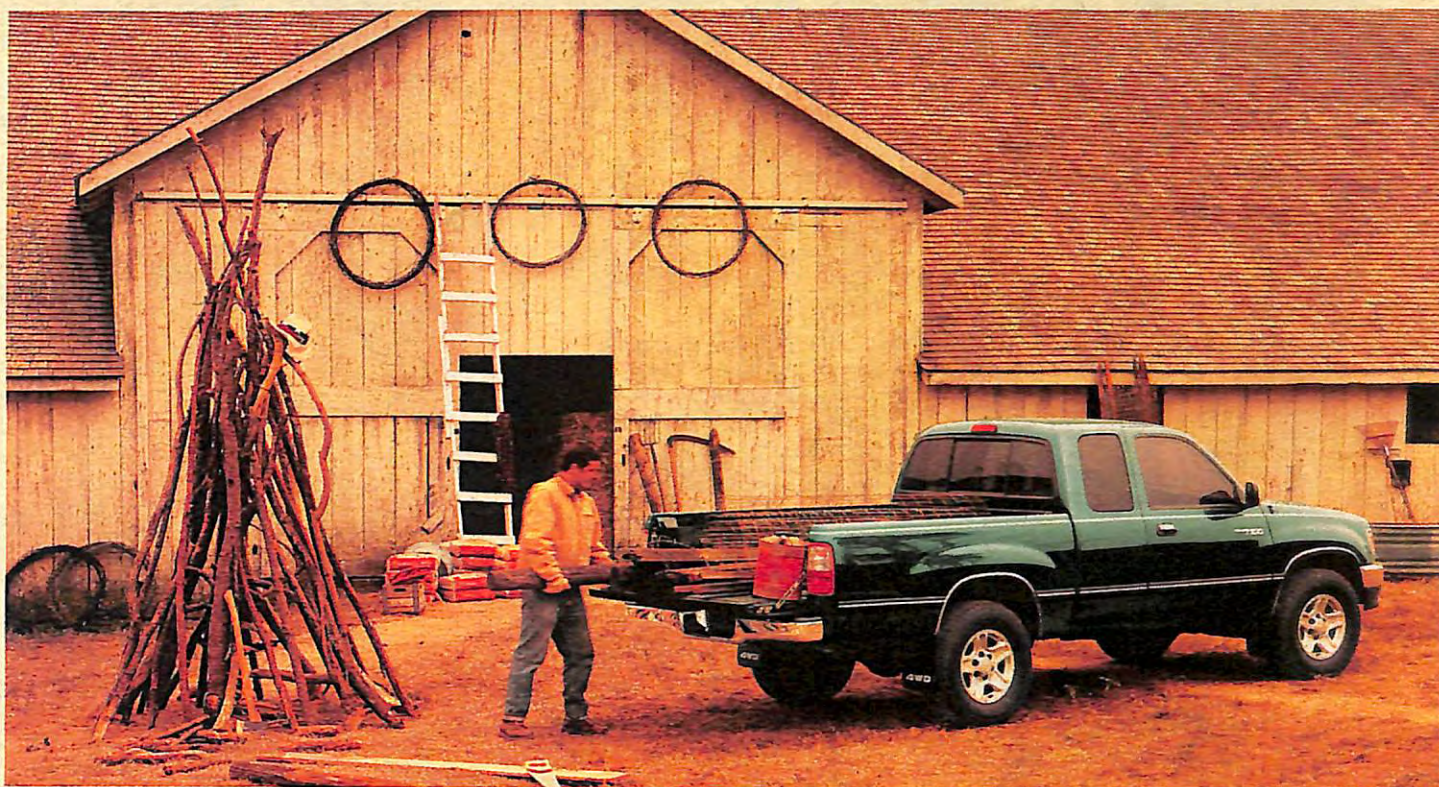
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